

The Online Library of Liberty

A Project Of Liberty Fund, Inc.

William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, Vol. I.* [1793]



The Online Library Of Liberty

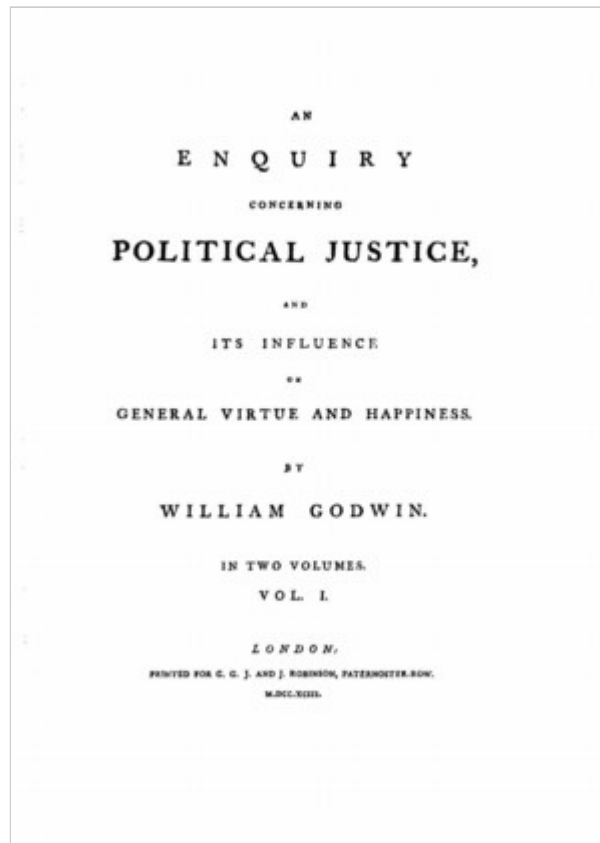
This E-Book (PDF format) is published by Liberty Fund, Inc., a private, non-profit, educational foundation established in 1960 to encourage study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals. 2010 was the 50th anniversary year of the founding of Liberty Fund.

It is part of the Online Library of Liberty web site <http://oll.libertyfund.org>, which was established in 2004 in order to further the educational goals of Liberty Fund, Inc. To find out more about the author or title, to use the site's powerful search engine, to see other titles in other formats (HTML, facsimile PDF), or to make use of the hundreds of essays, educational aids, and study guides, please visit the OLL web site. This title is also part of the Portable Library of Liberty DVD which contains over 1,000 books and quotes about liberty and power, and is available free of charge upon request.

The cuneiform inscription that appears in the logo and serves as a design element in all Liberty Fund books and web sites is the earliest-known written appearance of the word “freedom” (amagi), or “liberty.” It is taken from a clay document written about 2300 B.C. in the Sumerian city-state of Lagash, in present day Iraq.

To find out more about Liberty Fund, Inc., or the Online Library of Liberty Project, please contact the Director at oll@libertyfund.org.

LIBERTY FUND, INC.
8335 Allison Pointe Trail, Suite 300
Indianapolis, Indiana 46250-1684



Edition Used:

An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness, vol. 1 (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1793).

Author: [William Godwin](#)

About This Title:

Godwin's best known work of political theory. Written in the early years of the French Revolution before the Terror had begun, Godwin provides a devastating critique of unjust government institutions and optimistically proposes that individuals not the state can best provide for their needs. He believed that political change could best be brought about gradually and as a result of free discussion in small communities. This work has inspired many generations of radical thinkers.

About Liberty Fund:

Liberty Fund, Inc. is a private, educational foundation established to encourage the study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals.

Copyright Information:

The text is in the public domain.

Fair Use Statement:

This material is put online to further the educational goals of Liberty Fund, Inc. Unless otherwise stated in the Copyright Information section above, this material may be used freely for educational and academic purposes. It may not be used in any way for profit.



The image shows a scan of the 'CONTENTS' page of the first book of 'An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice' by William Godwin. The text is centered and includes the following details:

- C O N T E N T S**
- OF THE**
- F I R S T B O O K.**
- OF THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS.**
- C H A P. I.**
- INTRODUCTION.**
- T*HE Mill system—System of indifference—of justice the basis—of liberty—System of liberty extended. Page 1**
- C H A P. II.**
- HISTORY OF POLITICAL SOCIETY.**
- F*requency of war—among the ancients—among the moderns—the French—the English—Causes of war—Final laws—Defensive justice—Deduction—Enumeration of arguments. §**
- 5 C H A P.**

Table Of Contents

[Preface.](#)

[An Enquiry concerning Political Justice: Book I. OF The Importance of Political Institutions](#)

[Chap. I.: Introduction](#)

[Chap. II.: History of Political Society](#)

[Chap. III.: The Moral Characters of Men Originate In Their Perceptions](#)

[Chap. IV.: Three Principal Causes of Moral Improvement Considered](#)

[I. Literature](#)

[II. Education](#)

[III. Political Justice](#)

[Chap. V.: Influence of Political Institutions Exemplified](#)

[Chap. VI.: Human Inventions Capable of Perpetual Improvement](#)

[Chap. VII.: Of the Objection to These Principles From the Influence of Climate](#)

[Part I.: Of Moral and Physical Causes](#)

[Part II.: Of National Characters](#)

[Chap. VIII.: Of the Objection to These Principles From the Influence of Luxury](#)

[An Enquiry concerning Political Justice: Book II. PRINCIPLES OF SOCIETY](#)

[Chap. I.: Introduction](#)

[Chap. II.: Of Justice](#)

[Appendix, No. I. P. 87.: Of Suicide](#)

[Appendix, No. II.: Of Duelling](#)

[Chap. III.: Of Duty](#)

[Chap. IV.: Of the Equality of Mankind](#)

[Chap. V.: Rights of Man](#)

[Chap. VI.: Of the Exercise of Private Judgment](#)

[An Enquiry concerning Political Justice: Book III. PRINCIPLES OF Government](#)

[Chap. I.: Systems of Political Writers](#)

[Chap. II.: Of the Social Contract](#)

[Chap. III.: Of Promises](#)

[Chap. IV.: Of Political Authority](#)

[Chap. V.: Of Legislation](#)

[Chap. VI.: Of Obedience](#)

[Appendix](#)

[Chap. VII.: Of Forms of Government](#)

[An Enquiry concerning Political Justice: Book IV. MISCELLANEOUS Principles](#)

[Chap. I.: Of Resistance](#)

[Chap. II.: Of Revolutions](#)

[Section I.: Duties of a Citizen](#)

[Section II.: Mode of Effecting Revolutions](#)

[Section III.: Of Political Associations](#)

[Section IV.: Of the Species of Reform to Be Desired](#)

[Chap. III.: Of Tyrannicide](#)

[Chap. IV.: Of the Cultivation of Truth](#)

[Section I.: Of Abstract Or General Truth](#)

[Section II.: Of Sincerity](#)

[Appendix, No. I. P. 233.: Of the Connexion Between Understanding and Virtue](#)

[Appendix, No. Ii, P. 242.: Of the Mode of Excluding Visitors](#)

[Appendix, No. Iii, P. 252.: Subject of Sincerity Resumed](#)

[Chap. V.: Of Free Will and Necessity](#)

[Chap. VI.: Inferences From the Doctrine of Necessity](#)

[Chap. VII.: Of the Mechanism of the Human Mind](#)

[Chap. VIII.: Of the Principle of Virtue](#)

[Chap. IX.: Of the Tendency of Virtue](#)

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

PREFACE.

FEW works of literature are held in greater estimation, than those which treat in a methodical and elementary way of the principles of science. But the human mind in every enlightened age is progressive; and the best elementary treatises after a certain time are reduced in their value by the operation of subsequent discoveries. Hence it has always been desired by candid enquirers, that preceding works of this kind should from time to time be superseded, and that other productions including the larger views that have since offered themselves, should be substituted in their place.

It would be strange if something of this kind were not desirable in politics, after the great change that has been produced in men's minds upon this subject, and the light that has been thrown upon it by the recent discussions of America and France. A sense of the value of such a work, if properly executed, was the motive which gave birth to these volumes. Of their execution the reader must judge.

Authors who have formed the design of superseding the works of their predecessors, will be found, if they were in any degree equal to the design, not merely to have collected the scattered information that had been produced upon the subject, but to have increased the science with the fruit of their own meditations. In the following work principles will occasionally be found, which it will not be just to reject without examination, merely because they are new. It was impossible perseveringly to reflect upon so prolific a science, and a science which may be said to be yet in its infancy, without being led into ways of thinking that were in some degree uncommon.

Another argument in favour of the utility of such a work was frequently in the author's mind, and therefore ought to be mentioned. He conceived politics to be the proper vehicle of a liberal morality. That description of ethics deserves to be held in slight estimation, which seeks only to regulate our conduct in articles of particular and personal concern, instead of exciting our attention to the general good of the species. It appeared sufficiently practicable to make of such a treatise, exclusively of its direct political use, an advantageous vehicle of moral improvement. He was accordingly desirous of producing a work, from the perusal of which no man should rise without being strengthened in habits of sincerity, fortitude and justice.

Having stated the considerations in which the work originated, it is proper to mention a few circumstances of the outline of its history. The sentiments it contains are by no means the suggestions of a sudden effervescence of fancy. Political enquiry had long held a foremost place in the writer's attention. It is now twelve years since he became satisfied, that monarchy was a species of government unavoidably corrupt. He owed this conviction to the political writings of Swift and to a perusal of the Latin historians. Nearly at the same time he derived great additional instruction from reading the most considerable French writers upon the nature of man in the following order, *Système de la Nature*, Rousseau and Helvetius. Long before he thought of the present work, he had familiarised to his mind the arguments it contains on justice, gratitude, rights of man, promises, oaths and the omnipotence of truth. Political

complexity is one of the errors that take strongest hold on the understanding; and it was only by ideas suggested by the French revolution, that he was reconciled to the desirableness of a government of the simplest construction. To the same event he owes the determination of mind which gave existence to this work.

Such was the preparation which encouraged him to undertake the present treatise. The direct execution may be dismissed in a few words. It was projected in the month of May 1791: the composition was begun in the following September, and has therefore occupied a space of sixteen months. This period was devoted to the purpose with unremitting ardour. It were to be wished it had been longer; but it seemed as if no contemptible part of the utility of the work depended upon its early appearance.

The printing of the following treatise, as well as the composition, was influenced by the same principle, a desire to reconcile a certain degree of dispatch with the necessary deliberation. The printing was for that reason commenced, long before the composition was finished. Some disadvantages have arisen from this circumstance. The ideas of the author became more perspicuous and digested, as his enquiries advanced. The longer he considered the subject, the more accurately he seemed to understand it. This circumstance has led him into a few contradictions. The principal of these consists in an occasional inaccuracy of language, particularly in the first book, respecting the word government. He did not enter upon the work, without being aware that government by its very nature counteracts the improvement of individual mind; but he understood the full meaning of this proposition more completely as he proceeded, and saw more distinctly into the nature of the remedy. This, and a few other defects, under a different mode of preparation would have been avoided. The candid reader will make a suitable allowance. The author judges upon a review, that these defects are such as not materially to injure the object of the work, and that more has been gained than lost by the conduct he has pursued.

The period in which the work makes its appearance is singular. The people of England have assiduously been excited to declare their loyalty, and to mark every man as obnoxious who is not ready to sign the Shibboleth of the constitution. Money is raised by voluntary subscription to defray the expence of prosecuting men who shall dare to promulgate heretical opinions, and thus to oppress them at once with the enmity of government and of individuals. This was an accident wholly unforeseen when the work was undertaken; and it will scarcely be supposed that such an accident could produce any alteration in the writer's designs. Every man, if we may believe the voice of rumour, is to be prosecuted who shall appeal to the people by the publication of any unconstitutional paper or pamphlet; and it is added, that men are to be prosecuted for any unguarded words that may be dropped in the warmth of conversation and debate. It is now to be tried whether, in addition to these alarming encroachments upon our liberty, a book is to fall under the arm of the civil power, which, beside the advantage of having for one of its express objects the dissuading from all tumult and violence, is by its very nature an appeal to men of study and reflexion. It is to be tried whether a project is formed for suppressing the activity of mind, and putting an end to the disquisitions of science. Respecting the event in a personal view the author has formed his resolution. Whatever conduct his countrymen may pursue, they will not be able to shake his tranquillity. The duty he is most bound

to discharge is the assisting the progress of truth; and if he suffer in any respect for such a proceeding, there is certainly no vicissitude that can befall him, that can ever bring along with it a more satisfactory consolation.

But, exclusively of this precarious and unimportant consideration, it is the fortune of the present work to appear before a public that is panic struck, and impressed with the most dreadful apprehensions of such doctrines as are here delivered. All the prejudices of the human mind are in arms against it. This circumstance may appear to be of greater importance than the other. But it is the property of truth to be fearless, and to prove victorious over every adversary. It requires no great degree of fortitude, to look with indifference upon the false fire of the moment, and to foresee the calm period of reason which will succeed.

January 7, 1793.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

An
ENQUIRY
Concerning
POLITICAL JUSTICE

Book I.
OF THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTION

the subject proposed.—system of indifference—of passive obedience—of liberty.—system of liberty extended.

THE question which first presents itself in an enquiry concerning political institution, relates to the importance of the topic which is made the subject of enquiry. All men will grant that the happiness of the human species is the most desirable object for human science to promote; and that intellectual and moral happiness or pleasure is extremely to be preferred

BOOK I. CHAP. I.
The subject proposed.

to those which are precarious and transitory. The methods which may be proposed for the attainment of this object, are various. If it could be proved that a sound political institution was of all others the most powerful engine for promoting individual good, or on the other hand that an erroneous and corrupt government was the most formidable adversary to the improvement of the species, it would follow that politics was the first and most important subject of human investigation.

BOOK I. CHAP. I.

The opinions of mankind in this respect have been divided. By one set of men it is affirmed, that the different degrees of excellence ascribed to different forms of government are rather imaginary than real; that in the great objects of superintendance no government will eminently fail; and that it is neither the duty nor the wisdom of an honest and industrious individual to busy himself with concerns so foreign to the sphere of his industry.

System of
indifference:

A second class, in adopting the same principles, have given to them a different turn. Believing that all governments are nearly equal in their merit, they have regarded anarchy as the only political mischief that deserved to excite alarm, and have been the zealous and undistinguishing adversaries of all innovation. Neither of these classes has of course been inclined to ascribe to the science and practice of politics a pre-eminence over every other.

of passive obedience:

But the advocates of what is termed political liberty have all ways of liberty.
been numerous. They have placed this liberty principally
in two articles; the security of our persons, and the security of
our property. They have perceived that these objects could not be
effected but by the impartial administration of general laws, and the investing in the
people at large a certain power sufficient to give permanence to this administration.
They have pleaded, some for a less and some for a greater degree of equality among
the members of the community; and they have considered this equality as infringed or
endangered by enormous taxation, and the prerogatives and privileges of monarchs
and aristocratical bodies.

BOOK I. CHAP. I.

But, while they have been thus extensive in the object of their demand, they seem to
have agreed with the two former classes in regarding politics as an object of
subordinate importance, and only in a remote degree connected with moral
improvement. They have been prompted in their exertions rather by a quick sense of
justice and disdain of oppression, than by a consciousness of the intimate connection
of the different parts of the social system, whether as it relates to the intercourse of
individuals, or to the maxims and institutes of states and nations* .

It may however be reasonable to consider whether the science
of politics be not of somewhat greater value than any of these
reasoners have been inclined to suspect. It may fairly be
questioned, whether government be not still more considerable in
its incidental effects, than in those intended to be produced. Vice,
for example, depends for its existence upon the existence of
temptation. May not a good government strongly tend to extirpate, and a bad one to
increase the mass of temptation? Again, vice depends for its existence upon the
existence of error. May not a good government by taking away all restraints upon the
enquiring mind hasten, and a bad one by its patronage of error procrastinate the
discovery and establishment of truth? Let us consider the subject in this point of view.
If it can be proved that the science of politics is thus unlimited in its importance, the
advocates of liberty will have gained an additional recommendation, and its admirers
will be incited with the greater eagerness to the investigation of its principles.

system of liberty
extended.

BOOK I. CHAP. I.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. II.

HISTORY OF POLITICAL SOCIETY

frequency of war—among the ancients—among the moderns—the french—the english.—causes of war.—penal laws.—despotism.—deduction.—enumeration of arguments.

WHILE we enquire whether government is capable of improvement, we shall do well to consider its present effects. It is an old observation, that the history of mankind is little else than the history of crimes. War has hitherto been considered as the inseparable ally of political institution. The earliest records of time are the annals of conquerors and heroes, a Bacchus, a Sesostris, a Semiramis and a Cyrus. These princes led millions of men under their standard, and ravaged innumerable provinces. A small number only of their forces ever returned to their native homes, the rest having perished of diseases, hardships and misery. The evils they inflicted, and the mortality introduced in the countries against which their expeditions were directed, were certainly not less severe than those which their countrymen suffered. No sooner does history become more precise, than we are presented with the four great monarchies, that is, with four successful projects, by means of bloodshed, violence and murder, of enslaving mankind. The expedition of Cambyses against Egypt, of Darius against the Scythians, and of Xerxes against the Greeks, seem almost to set credibility at defiance by the fatal consequences with which they were attended. The conquests of Alexander cost innumerable lives, and the immortality of Cæsar is computed to have been purchased by the death of one million two hundred thousand men. Indeed the Romans, by the long duration of their wars, and their inflexible adherence to their purpose, are to be ranked among the foremost destroyers of the human species. Their wars in Italy endured for more than four hundred years, and their contest for supremacy with the Carthaginians two hundred. The Mithridatic war began with a massacre of one hundred and fifty thousand Romans, and in three single actions of the war five hundred thousand men were lost by the eastern monarch. Sylla, his ferocious conqueror, next turned his arms against his country, and the struggle between him and Marius was attended with proscriptions, butcheries and murders that knew no restraint from mercy and humanity. The Romans, at length, suffered the penalty of their iniquitous deeds; and the world was vexed for three hundred years by the irruptions of Goths, Vandals, Ostrogoths, Huns, and innumerable hordes of barbarians.

BOOK I. CHAP. II.
Frequency of war:

among the ancients:

BOOK I. CHAP. II.

I forbear to detail the victorious progress of Mahomet and the pious expeditions of Charlemagne. I will not enumerate the crusades against the infidels, the exploits of Aurungzebe, Gengiskan and Tamerlane, or the extensive murders of the

among the moderns:

Spaniards in the new world. Let us examine the civilized and favoured quarter of Europe, or even those countries of Europe which are thought most enlightened.

BOOK I. CHAP. II.

France was wasted by successive battles during a whole century, for the question of the Salic law, and the claim of the Plantagenets. Scarcely was this contest terminated, before the religious wars broke out, some idea of which we may form from the siege of Rochelle, where of fifteen thousand persons shut up eleven thousand perished of hunger and misery; and from the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, in which the numbers assassinated were forty thousand. This quarrel was appeased by Henry the fourth, and succeeded by the thirty years war in Germany for superiority with the house of Austria, and afterwards by the military transactions of Louis the fourteenth.

the French:

In England the war of Cressy and Agincourt only gave place to the civil war of York and Lancaster, and again after an interval to the war of Charles the first and his parliament. No sooner was the constitution settled by the revolution, than we were engaged in a wide field of continental warfare by king William, the duke of Marlborough, Maria Theresa and the king of Prussia.

the English.

And what are in most cases the pretexts upon which war is undertaken? What rational man could possibly have given himself the least disturbance for the sake of choosing whether Henry the sixth or Edward the fourth should have the style of king of England? What Englishman could reasonably have drawn his sword for the purpose of rendering his country an inferior dependency of France, as it must necessarily have been if the ambition of the Plantagenets had succeeded? What can be more deplorable than to see us first engage eight years in war rather than suffer the haughty Maria Theresa to live with a diminished sovereignty or in a private station; and then eight years more to support the free-booter who had taken advantage of her helpless condition?

Causes of war.

BOOK I. CHAP. II.

The usual causes of war are excellently described by Swift. "Sometimes the quarrel between two princes is to decide which of them shall dispossess a third of his dominions, where neither of them pretends to any right. Sometimes one prince quarrels with another, for fear the other should quarrel with him. Sometimes a war is entered upon because the enemy is too strong; and sometimes because he is too weak. Sometimes our neighbours want the things which we have, or have the things which we want; and we both fight, till they take ours, or give us theirs. It is a very justifiable cause of war to invade a country after the people have been wasted by famine, destroyed by pestilence, or embroiled by factions among themselves. It is justifiable to enter into a war against our nearest ally, when one of his towns lies convenient for us, or a territory of land, that would render our dominions round and compact. If a prince

sends forces into a nation where the people are poor and ignorant, he may lawfully put the half of them to death, and make slaves of the rest, in order to civilize and reduce them from their barbarous way

BOOK I. CHAP. II.

of living. It is a very kingly, honourable and frequent practice, when one prince desires the assistance of another to secure him against an invasion, that the assistant, when he has driven out the invader, should seize on the dominions himself, and kill, imprison or banish the prince he came to relieve*.”

If we turn from the foreign transactions of states with each other, to the principles of their domestic policy, we shall not find much greater reason to be satisfied. A numerous class of mankind are held down in a state of abject penury, and are continually prompted by disappointment and distress to commit violence upon their more fortunate neighbours. The only mode which is employed to repress this violence, and to maintain the order and peace of society, is punishment. Whips, axes and gibbets, dungeons, chains and racks are the most approved and established methods of persuading men to obedience, and impressing upon their minds the lessons of reason. Hundreds of victims are annually sacrificed at the shrine of positive law and political institution.

Penal laws.

Add to this the species of government which prevails over nine tenths of the globe, which is despotism: a government, as Mr. Locke justly observes, altogether “vile and miserable,” and “more to be deprecated than anarchy itself.*”

BOOK I. CHAP. II.
Despotism.

This account of the history and state of man is not a declamation, but an appeal to facts. He that considers it cannot possibly regard political disquisition as a trifle, and government as a neutral and unimportant concern. I by no means call upon the reader implicitly to admit that these evils are capable of remedy, and that wars, executions and despotism can be extirpated out of the world. But I call upon him to consider whether they may be remedied. I would have him feel that civil policy is a topic upon which the severest investigation may laudably be employed.

Deduction.

If government be a subject, which, like mathematics, natural philosophy and morals, admits of argument and demonstration, then may we reasonably hope that men shall some time or other agree respecting it. If it comprehend every thing that is most important and interesting to man, it is probable that, when the theory is greatly advanced, the practice will not be wholly neglected. Men may one day feel that they are partakers of a common nature, and that true freedom and perfect equity, like food and air, are pregnant with benefit to every constitution. If there be the faintest hope that this shall be the final result, then certainly no subject can inspire to a sound mind such generous enthusiasm, such enlightened ardour and such invincible perseverance.

BOOK I. CHAP. II.

The probability of this improvement will be sufficiently established, if we consider, first, that the moral characters of men are the result of their perceptions: and, secondly, that of all the modes of operating upon mind government is the most considerable. In addition to these arguments it will be found, thirdly, that the good and ill effects of political institution are not less conspicuous in detail than in principle; and, fourthly, that perfectibility is one of the most unequivocal characteristics of the human species,

Enumeration of arguments.

so that the political, as well as the intellectual state of man, may be presumed to be in a course of progressive improvement.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. III.

THE MORAL CHARACTERS OF MEN ORIGINATE IN THEIR PERCEPTIONS

no innate principles.—objections to this assertion—from the early actions of infants—from the desire of self-preservation—from self-love—from pity—from the vices of children—tyranny.—sullenness.—conclusion.

WE bring into the world with us no innate principles: consequently we are neither virtuous nor vicious as we first come into existence. No truth can be more evident than this, to any man who will yield the subject an impartial consideration. Every principle is a proposition. Every proposition consists in the connection of at least two distinct ideas, which are affirmed to agree or disagree with each other. If therefore the principles be innate, the ideas must be so too. But nothing can be more incontrovertible, than that we do not bring pre-established ideas into the world with us.

BOOK I. CHAP. III.
No innate principles.

Let the innate principle be, that virtue is a rule to which we are obliged to conform. Here are three great and leading ideas, not to mention subordinate ones, which it is necessary to form, before we can so much as understand the proposition.

What is virtue? Previously to our forming an idea corresponding to this general term, it seems necessary that we should have observed the several features by which virtue is distinguished, and the several subordinate articles of right conduct, that taken together, constitute that mass of practical judgments to which we give the denomination of virtue. Virtue may perhaps be defined, that species of operations of an intelligent being, which conduces to the benefit of intelligent beings in general, and is produced by a desire of that benefit. But taking for granted the universal admission of this definition, and this is no very defensible assumption, how widely have people of different ages and countries disagreed in the application of this general conception to particulars? a disagreement by no means compatible with the supposition that the sentiment is itself innate.

BOOK I. CHAP. III.

The next innate idea included in the above proposition, is that of a rule or standard, a generical measure with which individuals are to be compared, and their conformity or disagreement with which is to determine their value.

Lastly, there is the idea of obligation, its nature and source, the obliger and the sanction, the penalty and the reward.

Who is there in the present state of scientific improvement, that will believe that this vast chain of perceptions and notions is

something that we bring into the world with us, a mystical magazine, shut up in the human embryo, whose treasures are to be gradually unfolded as circumstances shall require? Who does not perceive that they are regularly generated in the mind by a series of impressions, and digested and arranged by association and reflexion?

BOOK I. CHAP. III.

Experience has by many been supposed adverse to these reasonings: but it will upon examination be found to be perfectly in harmony with them. The child at the moment of his birth is totally unprovided with ideas, except such as his mode of existence in the womb may have supplied. His first impressions are those of pleasure and pain. But he has no foresight of the tendency of any action to obtain either the one or the other, previously to experience.

Objections to this assertion: from the early actions of infants:

A certain irritation of the palm of the hand will produce that contraction of the fingers, which accompanies the action of grasping. This contraction will at first be unaccompanied with design, the object will be grasped without any intention to retain it, and let go again without thought or observation. After a certain number of repetitions, the nature of the action will be perceived; it will be performed with a consciousness of its tendency; and even the hand stretched out upon the approach of any object that is desired. Present to the child, thus far instructed, a lighted candle. The sight of it will produce a pleasurable state of the organs of perception. He will stretch out his hand to the flame, and will have no apprehension of the pain of burning till he has felt the sensation.

BOOK I. CHAP. III.

At the age of maturity, the eyelids instantaneously close, when any substance, from which danger is apprehended, is advanced towards them; and this action is so spontaneous, as to be with great difficulty prevented by a grown person, though he should explicitly desire it. In infants there is no such propensity; and an object may be approached to their organs, however near and however suddenly, without producing this effect. Frowns will be totally indifferent to a child, who has never found them associated with the effects of anger. Fear itself is a species of foresight; and in no case exists till introduced by experience.

It has been said, that the desire of self-preservation is innate. I demand what is meant by this desire? Must we not understand by it, a preference of existence to non-existence? Do we prefer any thing but because it is apprehended to be good? It follows, that we cannot prefer existence, previously to our experience of the motives for preference it possesses. Indeed the ideas of life and death are exceedingly complicated, and very tardy in their formation. A child desires pleasure and loathes pain, long before he can have any imagination respecting the ceasing to exist.

from the desire of self-preservation:

Again, it has been said, that self-love is innate. But there cannot be an error more easy of detection. By the love of self we understand the approbation of pleasure, and dislike of pain: but this is only the faculty of perception under another

from self-love;

BOOK I. CHAP. III.

name. Who ever denied that man was a percipient being? Who ever dreamed that there was a particular instinct necessary to render him percipient?

Pity has sometimes been supposed an instance of innate principle; particularly as it seems to arise more instantaneously in young persons, and persons of little refinement, than in others. But it was reasonable to expect, that threats and anger, circumstances that have been associated with our own sufferings, should excite painful feelings in us in the case of others, independently of any laboured analysis. The cries of distress, the appearance of agony or corporal infliction, irresistibly revive the memory of the pains accompanied by those symptoms in ourselves. Longer experience and observation enable us to separate the calamities of others and our own safety, the existence of pain in one subject and of pleasure or benefit in others, or in the same at a future period, more accurately than we could be expected to do previously to that experience.

from pity:

Such then is universally the subject of human institution and education. We bring neither virtue nor vice with us at our entrance into the world. But the seeds of error are ordinarily sown so early as to pass with superficial observers for innate.

from the vices of children:

Our constitution prompts us to utter a cry at the unexpected sensation of pain. Infants early perceive the assistance they obtain from the volition of others; and they have at first no means of inviting that assistance but by an inarticulate cry. In this neutral and innocent circumstance, combined with the folly and imbecility of parents and nurses, we are presented with the first occasion of vice. Assistance is necessary, conducive to the existence, the health and the mental sanity of the infant. Empire in the infant over those who protect him is unnecessary. If we do not withhold our assistance precisely at the moment when it ceases to be requisite, if our compliance or our refusal be not in every case irrevocable, if we grant any thing to impatience, importunity or obstinacy, from that moment we become parties in the intellectual murder of our offspring.

BOOK I. CHAP. III.
tyranny:

In this case we instil into them the vices of a tyrant; but we are in equal danger of teaching them the vices of a slave. It is not till very late that mankind acquire the ideas of justice, retribution and morality, and these notions are far from existing in the minds of infants. Of consequence, when we strike, or when we rebuke them, we risk at least the exciting in them a sense of injury, and a feeling of resentment. Above all, sentiments of this sort cannot fail to be awakened, if our action be accompanied with symptoms of anger, cruelty, harshness or caprice. The same imbecility, that led us to inspire them with a spirit of tyranny by yielding to their importunities, afterwards dictates to us an inconsistent and capricious conduct, at one time denying them as absurdly, as at another we gratified them unreasonably. Who, that has observed the consequences of this treatment, how generally these mistakes are committed, how inseparable they are in some degree from the wisest and the best, will be surprised at the early indications of depravity in children* ?

sullenness.

BOOK I. CHAP. III.

From these reasonings it sufficiently appears, that the moral qualities of men are the produce of the impressions made upon them, and that there is no instance of an original propensity to evil. Our virtues and vices may be traced to the incidents which make the history of our lives, and if these incidents could be divested of every improper tendency, vice would be extirpated from the world. The task may be difficult, may be of slow progress, and of hope undefined and uncertain. But hope will never desert it; and the man who is anxious for the benefit of his species, will willingly devote a portion of his activity to an enquiry into the mode of effecting this extirpation in whole or in part, an enquiry which promises much, if it do not in reality promise every thing.

Conclusion.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. IV.

THREE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF MORAL IMPROVEMENT CONSIDERED

I. *LITERATURE.*

benefits of literature.—examples.—essential properties of literature.—its defects.

II. *EDUCATION.*

benefits of education.—causes of its imbecility.

III. *POLITICAL JUSTICE.*

benefits of political institution.—universality of its influence—proved by the mistakes of society.—origin of evil.

THERE are three principal causes by which the human mind is advanced towards a state of perfection; literature, or the diffusion of knowledge through the medium of discussion, BOOK I. CHAP. IV. whether written or oral; education, or a scheme for the early impression of right principles upon the hitherto unprejudiced mind; and political justice, or the adoption of any principle of morality and truth into the practice of a community. Let us take a momentary review of each of these.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

I. *LITERATURE*

FEW engines can be more powerful, and at the same time more salutary in their tendency, than literature. Without enquiring for the present into the cause of this phenomenon, it is sufficiently evident in fact, that the human mind is strongly infected with prejudice and mistake. The various opinions prevailing in different countries and among different classes of men upon the same subject, are almost innumerable; and yet of all these opinions only one can be true. Now the effectual way for extirpating these prejudices and mistakes seems to be literature.

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.
Benefits of literature.

Literature has reconciled the whole thinking world respecting the great principles of the system of the universe, and extirpated upon this subject the dreams of romance and the dogmas of superstition. Literature has unfolded the nature of the human mind, and Locke and others have established certain maxims respecting man, as Newton has done respecting matter, that are generally admitted for unquestionable. Discussion has ascertained with tolerable perspicuity the preference of liberty over slavery; and the Mainwarings, the Sibthorpes, and the Filmers, the race of speculative reasoners in favour of despotism, are almost extinct. Local prejudice had introduced innumerable privileges and prohibitions upon the subject of trade; speculation has nearly ascertained that perfect freedom is most favour able to her prosperity. If in many instances the collation of evidence have failed to produce universal conviction, it must however be considered, that it has not failed to produce irrefragable argument, and that falshood would have been much shorter in duration, if it had not been protected and inforced by the authority of political government.

Examples.

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.

Indeed, if there be such a thing as truth, it must infallibly be struck out by the collision of mind with mind. The restless activity of intellect will for a time be fertile in paradox and error; but these will be only diurnals, while the truths that occasionally spring up, like sturdy plants, will defy the rigour of season and climate. In proportion as one reasoner compares his deductions with those of another, the weak places of his argument will be detected, the principles he too hastily adopted will be overthrown, and the judgments, in which his mind was exposed to no sinister influence, will be confirmed. All that is requisite in these discussions is unlimited speculation, and a sufficient variety of systems and opinions. While we only dispute about the best way of doing a thing in itself wrong, we shall indeed make but a trifling progress; but, when we are once persuaded that nothing is too sacred to be brought to the touchstone of examination, science will advance with rapid strides. Men, who turn their attention to the boundless field of enquiry, and still more who recollect the innumerable errors and caprices of mind, are apt to imagine that the labour is without benefit and endless. But this cannot be the case, if truth at last have any real existence. Errors will, during the whole period of their reign, combat each other; prejudices that have passed unsuspected for ages, will have their

Essential properties of literature.

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.

era of detection; but, if in any science we discover one solitary truth, it cannot be overthrown.

Such are the arguments that may be adduced in favour of literature. But, even should we admit them in their full force, and at the same time suppose that truth is the omnipotent artificer by which mind can infallibly be regulated, it would yet by no means sufficiently follow that literature is alone adequate to all the purposes of human improvement. Literature, and particularly that literature by which prejudice is superseded, and the mind is strung to a firmer tone, exists only as the portion of a few. The multitude, at least in the present state of human society, cannot partake of its illuminations. For that purpose it would be necessary, that the general system of policy should become favourable, that every individual should have leisure for reasoning and reflection, and that there should be no species of public institution, which, having falshood for its basis, should counteract their progress. This state of society, if it did not precede the general dissemination of truth, would at least be the immediate result of it.

Its defects.

But in representing this state of society as the ultimate result, we should incur an obvious fallacy. The discovery of truth is a pursuit of such vast extent, that it is scarcely possible to prescribe bounds to it. Those great lines, which seem at present to mark the limits of human understanding, will, like the mists that rise from a lake, retire farther and farther the more closely we approach them. A certain quantity of truth will be sufficient for the subversion of tyranny and usurpation; and this subversion, by a reflected force, will assist our understandings in the discovery of truth. In the mean time, it is not easy to define the exact portion of discovery that must necessarily precede political melioration. The period of partiality and injustice will be shortened, in proportion as political rectitude occupies a principal share in our disquisition. When the most considerable part of a nation, either for numbers or influence, becomes convinced of the flagrant absurdity of its institutions, the whole will soon be prepared tranquilly and by a sort of common consent to supersede them.

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

II. *EDUCATION*

But, if it appear that literature, unaided by the regularity of institution and discipline, is inadequate to the reformation of the species, it may perhaps be imagined, that education, commonly so called, is the best of all subsidiaries for making up its defects. Education may have the advantage of taking mind in its original state, a soil prepared for culture, and as yet unfest with weeds; and it is a common and a reasonable opinion, that the task is much easier to plant right and virtuous dispositions in an unprejudiced understanding, than to root up the errors that have already become as it were a part of ourselves. If an erroneous and vicious education be, as it has been shewn to be, the source of all our depravity, an education, deprived of these errors, seems to present itself as the most natural exchange, and must necessarily render its subject virtuous and pure.

Benefits of education.

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.

I will imagine the pupil never to have been made the victim of tyranny or the slave of caprice. He has never been permitted to triumph in the success of importunity, and cannot therefore well have become restless, inconstant, fantastical or unjust. He has been inured to ideas of equality and independence, and therefore is not passionate, haughty and overbearing. The perpetual witness of a temperate conduct and reasonable sentiments, he is not blinded with prejudice, is not liable to make a false estimate of things, and of consequence has no immoderate desires after wealth, and splendour, and the gratifications of luxury. Virtue has always been presented to him under the most attractive form, as the surest medium of success in every honourable pursuit, the never-failing consolation of disappointment, and infinitely superior in value to every other acquisition.

It cannot be doubted that such an education is calculated to produce very considerable effects. In the world indeed the pupil will become the spectator of scenes very different from what his preconceived ideas of virtue might have taught him to expect. Let us however admit it to be possible so to temper the mind, as to render it proof against the influence of example and the allurements of luxury. Still it may be reasonable to doubt of the sufficiency of education. How many instances may we expect to find, in which a plan has been carried into execution, so enlightened, unremitting and ardent, as to produce these extraordinary effects? Where must the preceptor himself have been educated, who shall thus elevate his pupil above all the errors of mankind? If the world teach an implicit deference to birth and riches and accidental distinctions, he will scarcely be exempt from this deference. If the world be full of intrigue and rivalry and selfishness, he will not be wholly disinterested. If falsehood be with mankind at large reduced to a system, recommended by the prudent, commanded by the magistrate, enforced by the moralist*, and practised under a thousand forms, the individual will not always have the simplicity to be sincere, or the courage to be true. If prejudice have usurped the feat of

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.
Causes of its
imbecility.

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.

knowledge, if law and religion and metaphysics and government be surrounded with mystery and artifice, he will not know the truth, and therefore cannot teach it; he will not possess the criterion, and therefore cannot furnish it to another. Again; if a man thus mighty, thus accomplished, thus superior to rivalship and comparison, can be found, who will consent to the profanation of employing him in cultivating the mind of a boy, when he should be instructing the world?

Education, in the sense in which it has commonly been understood, though in one view an engine of unlimited power, is exceedingly incompetent to the great business of reforming

mankind. It performs its task weakly and in detail. The grand principles that the inventor seeks in his machines, and the philosopher in investigating the system of the universe, are such, as from a few simple data are sufficient to the production of a thousand events. But the education I have been describing is the reverse of this. It employs an immense combination of powers, and an endless chain of causes for the production of a single specimen. No task, which is not in its own nature impracticable, can easily be supposed more difficult, than that of counteracting universal error, and arming the youthful mind against the contagion of general example. The strongest mind that proposed this as its object, would scarcely undertake the forming more than one, or at most a very small number, of pupils. Where can a remedy be found for this fundamental disadvantage? where but in political justice, that all comprehensive scheme, that immediately applies to the removal of counteraction and contagion, that embraces millions in its grasp, and that educates in one school the preceptor and the pupil?

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

III. *POLITICAL JUSTICE*

The benefits of political justice will best be understood, if we consider society in the most comprehensive view, taking into our estimate the erroneous institutions by which the human mind has been too often checked in its career, as well as those well founded opinions of public and individual interest, which perhaps need only to be clearly explained, in order to their being generally received.

Benefits of political justice.

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.

Now in whatever light it be considered, we cannot avoid perceiving, first, that political institution is peculiarly strong in that very point in which the efficacy of education was deficient, the extent of its operation. That it in some way influences our conduct will hardly be disputed. It is sufficiently obvious that a despotic government is calculated to render men pliant, and a free one resolute and independent. All the effects that any principle adopted into the practice of a community may produce, it produces upon a comprehensive scale. It creates a similar bias in the whole, or a considerable part of the society. The motive it exhibits, the stimulus it begets, are operative, because they are fitted to produce effect upon mind. They will therefore inevitably influence all to whom they are equally addressed. Virtue, where virtue is the result, will cease to be a task of perpetual watchfulness and contention. It will neither be, nor appear to be, a sacrifice of our personal advantage to disinterested considerations. It will render those the confederates, support and security of our rectitude, who were before its most formidable enemies.

Universality of its influence:

Again, an additional argument in favour of the efficacy of political institutions, arises from the extensive influence which certain false principles, engendered by an imperfect system of society, have been found to exert. Superstition, an immoderate fear of shame, a false calculation of interest, are errors that have been always attended with the most extensive consequences. How incredible at the present day do the effects of superstition exhibited in the middle ages, the horrors of excommunication and interdict, and the humiliation of the greatest monarchs at the feet of the pope, appear? What can be more contrary to European modes than that dread of disgrace, which induces the Bramin widows of Indostan to destroy themselves upon the funeral pile of their husbands? What more horribly immoral than the mistaken idea which leads multitudes in commercial countries to regard fraud, falshood and circumvention as the truest policy? But, however powerful these errors may be, the empire of truth, if once established, would be incomparably greater. The man, who is enslaved by shame, superstition or deceit, will be perpetually exposed to an internal war of opinions, disapproving by an involuntary censure the conduct he has been most persuaded to adopt. No mind can be so far alienated from truth, as not in the midst of its degeneracy to have incessant returns of a better principle. No system of society can be so thoroughly pervaded with mistake, as not frequently to

proved by the mistakes of society.

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.

suggest to us sentiments of virtue, liberty and justice. But truth is in all its branches harmonious and consistent.

The recollection of this circumstance induces me to add as a concluding observation, that it may reasonably be doubted whether error could ever be formidable or long-lived, if government did not lend it support. The nature of mind is adapted to the perception of ideas, their correspondence and difference. In the right discernment of these is its true element and most congenial pursuit. Error would indeed for a time have been the result of our partial perceptions; but, as our perceptions are continually changing, and continually becoming more definite and correct, our errors would have been momentary, and our judgments have hourly approached nearer to the truth. The doctrine of transubstantiation, the belief that men were really eating flesh when they seemed to be eating bread, and drinking human blood when they seemed to be drinking wine, could never have maintained its empire so long, if it had not been reinforced by civil authority. Men would not have so long persuaded themselves that an old man elected by the intrigues of a conclave of cardinals, from the moment of that election became immaculate and infallible, if the persuasion had not been maintained by revenues, endowments and palaces. A system of government, that should lend no sanction to ideas of fanaticism and hypocrisy, would presently accustom its subjects to think justly upon topics of moral worth and importance. A state, that should abstain from imposing contradictory and impracticable oaths, and thus perpetually stimulating its members to concealment and perjury, would soon become distinguished for plain dealing and veracity. A country, in which places of dignity and confidence should cease to be at the disposal of faction, favour and interest, would not long be the residence of servility and deceit.

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.

These remarks suggest to us the true answer to an obvious objection, that might otherwise present itself, to the conclusion to which these principles appear to lead. It might be said, that an erroneous government can never afford an adequate solution for the existence of moral evil, since government was itself the production of human intelligence, and therefore, if ill, must have been indebted for its ill qualities to some wrong which had previous existence.

Origin of evil.

The proposition asserted in this objection is undoubtedly true. All vice is nothing more than error and mistake reduced into practice, and adopted as the principle of our conduct. But error is perpetually hastening to its own detection. Vicious conduct is soon discovered to involve injurious consequences. Injustice therefore by its own nature is little fitted for a durable existence. But government “lays its hand upon the spring there is in society, and puts a stop to its motion*.” It gives substance and permanence to our errors. It reverses the genuine propensities of mind, and, instead of suffering us to look forward, teaches us to look backward for perfection. It prompts us to seek the public welfare, not in innovation and improvement, but in a timid reverence for the decisions of our ancestors, as if it were the nature of mind always to degenerate, and never to advance.

BOOK I. CHAP. IV.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. V.

INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS EXEMPLIFIED

robbery and fraud, two great vices in society—originate, 1. in extreme poverty—2. in the ostentation of the rich—3. in their tyranny—rendered permanent—1. by legislation—2. by the administration of law—3. by the inequality of condition.

THE efficacy of political institutions will be rendered still more evident, if we enquire into the history of the most considerable vices at present existing in society; and if it can be shewn that they derive their inveteracy from political institution.

BOOK I. CHAP. V.

Two of the greatest abuses relative to the interior policy of nations, which at this time prevail in the world, will be allowed to consist in the irregular transfer of property, either first by violence, or secondly by fraud. If among the inhabitants of any country there existed no desire in one individual to possess himself of the substance of another, or no desire so vehement and restless, as to prompt him to acquire it by means inconsistent with order and justice; undoubtedly in that country guilt could

Robbery and fraud,
two great vices in
society:

hardly be known but by report. If every man could with perfect facility obtain the necessaries of life, and, obtaining them, feel no uneasy craving after its superfluities, temptation would lose its power. Private interest would visibly accord with public good; and civil society become all that poetry has feigned of the golden age. Let us enquire into the principles to which these evils owe their existence, and the treatment by which they may be alleviated or remedied.

BOOK I. CHAP. V.

First then it is to be observed, that, in the most refined states of Europe, the inequality of property has arisen to an alarming height. Vast numbers of their inhabitants are deprived of almost every accommodation that can render life tolerable or secure. Their utmost industry scarcely suffices for their support. The women and children lean with an insupportable weight upon the efforts of the man, so that a large family has in the lower order of life become a proverbial expression for an uncommon degree of poverty and wretchedness. If sickness or some of those casualties which are perpetually incident to an active and laborious life, be superadded to these burthens, the distress is yet greater.

originate, 1. in
extreme poverty.

It seems to be agreed that in England there is less wretchedness and distress than in most of the kingdoms of the continent. In England the poors' rates amount to the sum of two millions sterling per annum. It has been calculated that one person in seven of the inhabitants of this country derives at some period of his life assistance from this fund. If to this we add the persons,

BOOK I. CHAP. V.

who, from pride, a spirit of independence, or the want of a legal settlement, though in equal distress, receive no such assistance, the proportion will be considerably increased.

I lay no stress upon the accuracy of this calculation; the general fact is sufficient to give us an idea of the greatness of the abuse. The consequences that result are placed beyond the reach of contradiction. A perpetual struggle with the evils of poverty, if frequently ineffectual, must necessarily render many of the sufferers desperate. A painful feeling of their oppressed situation will itself deprive them of the power of surmounting it. The superiority of the rich, being thus unmercifully exercised, must inevitably expose them to reprisals; and the poor man will be induced to regard the state of society as a state of war, an unjust combination, not for protecting every man in his rights and securing to him the means of existence, but for engrossing all its advantages to a few favoured individuals, and reserving for the portion of the rest want, dependence and misery.

A second source of those destructive passions by which the peace of society is interrupted, is to be found in the luxury, the pageantry and magnificence with which enormous wealth is usually accompanied. Human beings are capable of encountering with cheerfulness considerable hardships, when those hardships are impartially shared with the rest of the society, and they are not insulted with the spectacle of indolence and ease in others, no way deserving of greater advantages than themselves. But it is a bitter aggravation of their own calamity, to have the privileges of others forced on their observation, and, while they are perpetually and vainly endeavouring to secure for themselves and their families the poorest conveniences, to find others revelling in the fruits of their labours. This aggravation is assiduously administered to them under most of the political establishments at present in existence. There is a numerous class of individuals, who, though rich, have neither brilliant talents nor sublime virtues; and, however highly they may prize their education, their affability, their superior polish and the elegance of their manners, have a secret consciousness that they possess nothing by which they can so securely assert their pre-eminence and keep their inferiors at a distance, as the splendour of their equipage, the magnificence of their retinue and the sumptuousness of their entertainments. The poor man is struck with this exhibition; he feels his own miseries; he knows how unwearied are his efforts to obtain a slender pittance of this prodigal waste; and he mistakes opulence for felicity. He cannot persuade himself that an embroidered garment may frequently cover an aching heart.

2. in the ostentation of the rich:

BOOK I. CHAP. V.

A third disadvantage that is apt to connect poverty with discontent consists in the insolence and usurpation of the rich. If the poor man would in other respects compose himself in philosophic indifference, and, conscious that he possesses every thing that is truly honourable to man as fully as his rich neighbour, would look upon the rest as beneath his envy, his neighbour will not permit him to do so. He seems as if he could never be satisfied with his possessions unless he can make the spectacle of them grating to others; and that honest self-esteem, by which his inferior might

3. in their tyranny:

BOOK I. CHAP. V.

otherwise arrive at apathy, is rendered the instrument of galling him with oppression and injustice. In many countries justice is avowedly made a subject of solicitation, and the man of the highest rank and most splendid connections almost infallibly carries his cause against the unprotected and friendless. In countries where this shameless practice is not established, justice is frequently a matter of expensive purchase, and the man with the longest purse is proverbially victorious. A consciousness of these facts must be expected to render the rich little cautious of offence in his dealings with the poor, and to inspire him with a temper overbearing, dictatorial and tyrannical. Nor does this indirect oppression satisfy his despotism. The rich are in all such countries directly or indirectly the legislators of the state; and of consequence are perpetually reducing oppression into a system, and depriving the poor of that little commonage of nature as it were, which might otherwise still have remained to them.

The opinions of individuals, and of consequence their desires, for BOOK I. CHAP. V. desire is nothing but opinion maturing for action, will always be in a great degree regulated by the opinions of the community. But the manners prevailing in many countries are accurately calculated to impress a conviction, that integrity, virtue, understanding and industry are nothing, and that opulence is every thing. Does a man, whose exterior denotes indigence, expect to be well received in society, and especially by those who would be understood to dictate to the rest? Does he find or imagine himself in want of their assistance and favour? He is presently taught that no merits can atone for a mean appearance. The lesson that is read to him is, Go home, enrich yourself by whatever means, obtain those superfluities which are alone regarded as estimable, and you may then be secure of an amicable reception. Accordingly poverty in such countries is viewed as the greatest of demerits. It is escaped from with an eagerness that has no leisure for the scruples of honesty. It is concealed as the most indelible disgrace. While one man chooses the path of undistinguishing accumulation, another plunges into expences which are to impose him upon the world as more opulent than he is. He hastens to the reality of that penury, the appearance of which he dreads; and, together with his property, sacrifices the integrity, veracity and character which might have consoled him in his adversity.

Such are the causes, that, in different degrees under the different rendered permanent: governments of the world, prompt mankind openly or BOOK I. CHAP. V. secretly to encroach upon the property of each other. Let us consider how far they admit either of remedy or aggravation from political institution. Whatever tends to decrease the injuries attendant upon poverty, decreases at the same time the inordinate desire and the enormous accumulation of wealth. Wealth is not pursued for its own sake, and seldom for the sensual gratifications it can purchase, but for the same reasons that ordinarily prompt men to the acquisition of learning, eloquence and skill, for the love of distinction and fear of contempt. How few would prize the possession of riches, if they were condemned to enjoy their equipage, their palaces and their entertainments in solitude, with no eye to wonder at their magnificence, and no sordid observer ready to convert that wonder into an adulation of the owner? If admiration were not generally deemed the exclusive property of the rich, and contempt the constant lacquey of poverty, the

love of gain would cease to be an universal passion. Let us consider in what respects political institution is rendered subservient to this passion.

First then, legislation is in almost every country grossly the favourer of the rich against the poor. Such is the character of the game laws, by which the industrious rustic is forbidden to destroy the animal that preys upon the hopes of his future subsistence, or to supply himself with the food that unsought thrusts itself in his path. Such was the spirit of the late revenue laws

1. by legislation:

of France, which in several of their provisions fell exclusively upon the humble and industrious, and exempted from their operation those who were best able to support it. Thus in England the land tax at this moment produces half a million less than it did a century ago, while the taxes on consumption have experienced an addition of thirteen millions per annum during the same period. This is an attempt, whether effectual or no, to throw the burthen from the rich upon the poor, and as such is an exhibition of the spirit of legislation. Upon the same principle robbery and other offences, which the wealthier part of the community have no temptation to commit, are treated as capital crimes, and attended with the most rigorous, often the most inhuman punishments. The rich are encouraged to associate for the execution of the most partial and oppressive positive laws. Monopolies and patents are lavishly dispensed to such as are able to purchase them. While the most vigilant policy is employed to prevent combinations of the poor to fix the price of labour, and they are deprived of the benefit of that prudence and judgment which would select the scene of their industry.

BOOK I. CHAP. V.

Secondly, the administration of law is not less iniquitous than the spirit in which it is framed. Under the late government of France the office of judge was a matter of purchase, partly by an open price advanced to the crown, and partly by a secret *douceur* paid to the minister. He, who knew best how to manage his market in the retail trade of justice, could afford to purchase the good will of its functions at the highest price. To the client justice was avowedly made an object of personal solicitation, and a powerful friend, a handsome woman, or a proper present, were

2. by the administration of law:

articles of much greater value than a good cause. In England the criminal law is administered with tolerable impartiality so far as regards the trial itself; but the number of capital offences, and of consequence the frequency of pardons, open even here a wide door to favour and abuse. In causes relating to property the practice of law is arrived at such a pitch as to render all justice ineffectual. The length of our chancery suits, the multiplied appeals from court to court, the enormous fees of counsel, attornies, secretaries, clerks, the drawing of briefs, bills, replications and rejoinders, and what has sometimes been called the glorious uncertainty of the law, render it often more advisable to resign a property than to contest it, and particularly exclude the impoverished claimant from the faintest hope of redress. Nothing certainly is more practicable than to secure to all questions of controversy a cheap and speedy decision, which, combined with the independence of the judges and a few obvious improvements in the construction of juries, would insure the equitable application of general rules to all characters and stations.

BOOK I. CHAP. V.

Thirdly, the inequality of conditions usually maintained by political institution, is calculated greatly to enhance the imagined excellence of wealth. In the ancient monarchies of the east, and in Turkey at the present day, an eminent station could scarcely fail to excite implicit deference. The timid inhabitant trembled before his superior; and would have thought it little less than blasphemy, to touch the veil drawn by the proud satrap over his inglorious origin. The same principles were extensively prevalent under the feudal system. The vassal, who was regarded as a sort of live stock upon the estate, and knew of no appeal from the arbitrary fiat of his lord, would scarcely venture to suspect that he was of the same species. This however constituted an unnatural and violent situation. There is a propensity in man to look farther than the outside; and to come with a writ of enquiry into the title of the upstart and the successful. In England at the present day there are few poor men who do not console themselves, by the freedom of their animadversions upon their superiors. The new-fangled gentleman is by no means secure against having his tranquillity disturbed by their surly and pointed sarcasms. This propensity might easily be encouraged, and made conducive to the most salutary purposes. Every man might, as was the case in certain countries upon record, be inspired with the consciousness of citizenship, and be made to feel himself an active and efficient member of the great whole. The poor man would then perceive, that, if eclipsed, he could not be trampled upon; and he would no longer be stung with the furies of envy, resentment and despair.

3. by the inequality of conditions.

BOOK I. CHAP. V.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. VI.

HUMAN INVENTIONS CAPABLE OF PERPETUAL IMPROVEMENT

perfectibility of man—instanced, first, in language.—its beginnings.—abstraction.—complexity of language.—second instance: alphabetical writing.—hieroglyphics at first universal.—progressive deviations.—application.

IF we would form to ourselves a solid estimate of political, or indeed of any other science, we ought not to confine our survey to that narrow portion of things which passes under our own immediate inspection, and rashly pronounce every thing that we have not ourselves seen, to be impossible. There is no characteristic of man, which seems at present at least so eminently to distinguish him, or to be of so much importance in every branch of moral science, as his perfectibility. Let us carry back our minds to man in his original state, a being capable of impressions and knowledge to an unbounded extent, but not having as yet received the one or cultivated the other; and let us contrast this being with all that science and genius have effected: and from hence we may form some idea what it is of which hu

BOOK I. CHAP. VI.
Perfectibility of man:

man nature is capable. It is to be remembered, that this being did not as now derive assistance from the communications of his fellows, nor had his feeble and crude conceptions assisted by the experience of successive centuries; but that in the state we are figuring all men were equally ignorant. The field of improvement was before them, but for every step in advance they were to be indebted to their untutored efforts. Nor is it of any consequence whether such was actually the progress of mind, or whether, as others teach, the progress was abridged, and man was immediately advanced half way to the end of his career by the interposition of the author of his nature. In any case it is an allowable and no unimproving speculation, to consider mind as it is in itself, and to enquire what would have been its history, if, immediately upon its production, it had been left to be acted upon by those ordinary laws of the universe with whose operation we are acquainted.

BOOK I. CHAP. VI.

One of the acquisitions most evidently requisite as a preliminary to our present improvements is that of language. But it is impossible to conceive of an acquisition, that must have been in its origin more different from what at present it is found, or that less promised that copiousness and refinement it has since exhibited.

instanced, I. in language.

Its beginning was probably from those involuntary cries, which infants for example are found to utter in the earliest stages of their existence, and which, previously to the idea of exciting pity or procuring assistance, spontaneously arise from the operation of pain upon our animal frame. These cries, when

Its beginning.

BOOK I. CHAP. VI.

actually uttered, become a subject of perception to him by whom they are uttered; and, being observed to be constantly associated with certain preliminary impressions and to excite the idea of those impressions in the hearer, may afterwards be repeated from reflection and the desire of relief. Eager desire to communicate any information to another, will also prompt us to utter some simple sound for the purpose of exciting attention: this sound will probably frequently recur to organs unpractised to variety, and will at length stand as it were by convention for the information intended to be conveyed. But the distance is extreme from these simple modes of communication, which we possess in common with some of the inferior animals, to all the analysis and abstraction which languages require.

Abstraction indeed, though as it is commonly understood it be one of the sublimest operations of mind, is in some sort coeval with and inseparable from the existence of mind. The next step to simple perception is that of comparison, or the coupling together of two ideas and the perception of their resemblances and differences. Without comparison there can be no preference, and without preference no action: though it must be acknowledged, that this comparison is an operation that may be performed by the mind without adverting to its nature, and that

Abstraction.

neither the brute nor the savage has any consciousness of the several steps of the intellectual progress. Comparison

BOOK I. CHAP. VI.

immediately leads to imperfect abstraction. The sensation of to-day is classed, if similar, with the sensation of yesterday, and an inference is made respecting the conduct to be adopted. Without this degree of abstraction the faint dawnings of language already described could never have existed. Abstraction, which was necessary to the first existence of language, is again assisted in its operations by language. That generalisation, which is implied in the very notion of thought, being thus embodied and rendered palpable, makes the mind acquainted with its own powers and creates a restless desire after farther progress.

But, though it be by no means impossible, to trace the causes that concurred to the production of language, and to prove them adequate to their effect, it does not the less appear that this is an

Complexity of language.

acquisition of slow growth and inestimable value. The very steps, were we to pursue them, would appear like an endless labyrinth. The distance is immeasurable between the three or four vague and inarticulate sounds uttered by animals, and the copiousness of lexicography or the regularity of grammar. The general and special names by which things are at first complicated and afterwards divided, the names by which properties are separated from their substances and powers from both, the comprehensive distribution of parts of speech, verbs, adjectives and particles, the inflexions of words by which the change of their terminations changes their meaning through a variety

of shadings, their concords and their governments, all of them present us with such a boundless catalogue of science, that he, who on the one hand did not know that the boundless task had been actually performed, or who on the other was not intimately acquainted with the progressive nature of mind, would pronounce the accomplishment of them impossible.

BOOK I. CHAP. VI.

A second invention, well calculated to impress us with a sense of the progressive nature of man, is that of alphabetical writing. Hieroglyphical or picture writing appears at some time to have been universal, and the difficulty of conceiving the gradation from this to alphabetical is so great, as to have induced Hartley, one of the most acute of all philosophical writers, to have recourse to miraculous interposition as the only adequate solution. In reality no problem can be imagined more operose, than that of decomposing the sounds of words into four and twenty simple elements or letters, and again finding these elements in all other words. When we have examined the subject a little more closely, and perceived the steps by which this labour was accomplished, perhaps the immensity of the labour will rather gain upon us, as he that shall have counted a million of units, will have a vaster idea upon the subject, than he that only considers them in the gross.

Second instance:
alphabetical writing.
Hieroglyphics at first
universal.

In China hieroglyphical writing has never been superseded by alphabetical, and this from the very nature of their language, which is considerably monosyllabic, the same found being made to signify a great variety of objects, by means of certain shadings of tone too delicate for any alphabet to be able to represent. They have however two kinds of writing, one for the learned, and another for the vulgar. The learned adhere closely to their hieroglyphical writing, representing every word by its corresponding picture; but the vulgar are frequent in their deviations from it.

progressive
deviations.

BOOK I. CHAP. VI.

Hieroglyphical writing and speech may indeed be considered in the first instance as two languages, running parallel to each other, but with no necessary connection. The picture and the word each of them represent the idea, one as immediately as the other. But, though independent, they will become accidentally associated; the picture at first imperfectly, and afterwards more constantly suggesting the idea of its correspondent sound. It is in this manner that the mercantile classes of China began to corrupt, as it is styled, their hieroglyphical writing. They had a word suppose of two syllables to write. The character appropriate to that word they were not acquainted with, or it failed to suggest itself to their memory. Each of the syllables however was a distinct word in the language, and the characters belonging to them perfectly familiar. The expedient that suggested itself was to write these two characters with a mark signifying their union, though in reality the characters had hitherto been appropriated to ideas of a different sort, wholly unconnected with that now intended to be conveyed. Thus a sort of rebus or chararde was produced.

BOOK I. CHAP. VI.

In other cases the word, though monosyllabic, was capable of being divided into two sounds, and the same process was employed. This is a first step towards alphabetical analysis. Some word, such as the interjection *O!* or the particle *A* is already a sound perfectly simple, and thus furnishes a first stone to the edifice. But, though these ideas may perhaps present us with a faint view of the manner in which an alphabet was produced, yet the actual production of a complete alphabet is perhaps of all human discoveries, that which required the most persevering reflection, the luckiest concurrence of circumstances, and the most patient and gradual progress.

Let us however suppose man to have gained the two first elements of knowledge, speaking and writing; let us trace him through all his subsequent improvements, through whatever constitutes the inequality between Newton and the ploughman, and indeed much more than this, since the most ignorant ploughman in civilised society is infinitely different from what he would have been, when stripped of all the benefits he has derived from literature and the arts. Let us survey the earth covered with the labours of man, houses, inclosures, harvests, manufactures, instruments, machines, together with all the wonders of painting, poetry, eloquence and philosophy.

Application.

Such was man in his original state, and such is man as we at present behold him. Is it possible for us to contemplate what he has already done, without being impressed with a strong presentiment of the improvements he has yet to accomplish? There is no science that is not capable of additions; there is no art that may not be carried to a still higher perfection. If this be true of all other sciences, why not of morals? If this be true of all other arts, why not of social institution? The very conception of this as possible, is in the highest degree encouraging. If we can still farther demonstrate it to be a part of the natural and regular progress of mind, our confidence and our hopes will then be complete. This is the temper with which we ought to engage in the study of political truth. Let us look back, that we may profit by the experience of mankind; but let us not look back, as if the wisdom of our ancestors was such as to leave no room for future improvement.

BOOK I. CHAP. VI.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. VII.

OF THE OBJECTION TO THESE PRINCIPLES FROM THE INFLUENCE OF CLIMATE

Part I.

OF MORAL AND PHYSICAL CAUSES

the question stated.—provinces of sensation and reflection.—moral causes frequently mistaken for physical.—superiority of the former evident from the varieties of human character.—operation of physical causes rarex2014fertilityoilily of reflection.—physical causes in the first instance superior, afterwards moral.—objection from the effect of breed in animals.—conclusion.

THERE are certain propositions which may be considered indifferently, either as corollaries flowing from the principles already established, or as a source of new arguments against the validity of those principles. In the first view they are entitled to a clear and perspicuous statement, and in the second to a mature examination. For example:

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

The causes which appear to operate upon the human mind may be divided into two classes; perceptions, which are rendered directly a subject of reasoning, and regarded by the intellect as inducements to action; and perceptions, which act indirectly upon the mind, by rendering the animal frame gay, vigorous and elastic, or on the contrary sluggish, morbid and inactive. According to the system already established, the former of these are to be regarded as the whole, the latter being so comparatively inefficient and subordinate as to stand in the estimate as almost nothing. To many reasoners however they have by no means appeared of so trivial importance, and it may not be useless to examine for a moment the ideas they have formed, and the reasons which have induced them to ascribe so much to the meanest branch of the human constitution.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.
The question stated.

Impressions upon our senses may act either as physical or moral causes. Indisposition of the body operates upon the mind principally in the first of these ways, seeming without any formal deliberation of the understanding to incline us to dissatisfaction and indolence. Corporal punishment affects us principally in the latter mode, since, though it directly introduces a painful state of the mind, it influences our conduct, only as it is reflected upon by the understanding, and converted into a motive of action.

It may be a curious speculation to examine how far these classes are distinct from each other. It cannot be denied but

Provinces of sensation and reflection.

that sensation is of some moment in the affair. It possesses the initiative. It is that from which all the intellects with which we are acquainted date their operations. Its first effect upon mind does in the majority of cases precede reflection and choice. In some cases the impressions upon our senses are foreseen by us, and may consequently be resisted in the outset. But it would be a contradiction to affirm that they can always be foreseen. Foresight is itself the offspring of experience.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

Meanwhile, though they can only in particular instances be foreseen, and of consequence completely forestalled, yet much of their effect is in all cases to be ascribed to deliberation and choice. "I feel a painful sensation, and I persuade myself that it is wiser to submit, and thus cherish and second its influence, than to resist. I conceive myself unfortunate, oppressed by a combination of unfavourable accidents, and am rendered by this conception gloomy, discontented and wretched. I satisfy myself that my situation is such as to render exertion unreasonable, and believe that the attempt would produce nothing but abortive and fruitless torture. I remain listless, sluggish and inactive."

Moral causes frequently mistaken for physical.

How different would be the sum of my situation, if I were animated by sentiments of cheerfulness, industry and courage? It has been said "that a rainy day has been known to convert a

man of valour into a coward." How easily would this external disadvantage have been surmounted, if his mind had been more full of the benefits to arise from his valour, if the rainy day had been put in the balance with his wife and children, the most illustrious rewards to be bestowed upon himself, and freedom and felicity to be secured to his country? "Indigestion," we are told, "perhaps a fit of the tooth-ach, renders a man incapable of strong thinking and spirited exertion." How long would these be able to hold out against a sudden and unexpected piece of intelligence of the most delightful nature?

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

When operations of an injurious nature are inflicted on the body, and are encountered by the mind with unalterable firmness, what is the degree of pain which in such instances is suffered? Was the language of Anaxarchus merely a philosophical rant, "Beat on, tyrant! Thou mayest destroy the shell of Anaxarchus, but thou canst not touch Anaxarchus himself?" How much pain was really endured by Mutius Scævola and archbishop Cranmer, when each steadily held his hand to be devoured by the flames? How much is endured by the savage Indians, who sing in the midst of tortures, and sarcastically provoke their tormentors to more ingenious barbarity?

The truth that seems to result from these considerations is, that indisposition only becomes formidable in proportion as it is seconded by the consent of the mind; that our communication with the material universe is at the mercy of our choice; and that the inability of the understanding for intellectual exertion is principally an affair of moral consideration, existing only in the degree in which it is deliberately preferred.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

"The hero of to-day," we are told, "shall by an indigestion or

a rainy atmosphere be converted into a coward to-morrow.”

Waving the consideration of how far this fact where it exists is in reality of a moral and intellectual nature, let us examine to what degree a principle of this sort is the true index of human actions.

Superiority of the former evident from the varieties of human character.

We have already established it as a fundamental, that there are no innate ideas. Of consequence, if men were principally governed by external circumstances such as that of atmosphere, their characters and actions would be much alike. The same weather, that made you a coward, would make me so too, and an army would be defeated by a fog. Perhaps indeed this catastrophe would be prevented by the impartiality of the moisture, in proportion as the enemy advanced, which he necessarily must do, into the same atmosphere.

Every thing that checks the uniformity of this effect, and permanently distinguishes the character of one man from that of another, is to be traced to the association of ideas. But association is of the nature of reasoning. The principal, the most numerous and lasting of our associations, are intellectual, not accidental, built upon the resemblances and differences of things,

not upon the contingency of their occurring in any given time or place. It is thus that one man appears courageous and another cowardly, one man vigorous and another dull, under the same or nearly the same external circumstances.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

In reality the atmosphere, instead of considerably affecting the mass of mankind, affects in an eminent degree only a small part of that mass. The majority are either above or below it; are either

Operation of physical causes rare.

too gross to feel strongly these minute variations, or too busy to be at leisure to attend to them. It is only a few, whose treatment has been tender enough to imbue them with extreme delicacy, and whose faculties are not roused by strong and unintermitted incitements, who can be thus blindly directed. If it should be said “that the weather indeed is too great a trifle to produce these consequences, but that there are pains and interruptions which scarcely any man can withstand;” it may be answered, that these occur too seldom to be mistaken for the efficient principles of human character, that the system which determines our proceedings rises from a different source, and ordinarily returns when the pain or interruption has subsided.

There can be no question more interesting than that which we are now considering. Upon our decision in this case it depends, whether those persons act wisely who prescribe to themselves a certain discipline and are anxious to enrich their minds with science, or whether on the contrary it be better to trust every thing to the mercy of events. Is it possible that

we should not perceive from the very nature of the thing the advantages which the wise man possesses over the foolish one, and that the points in which they resemble will be as nothing compared to those in which they differ? In those particulars in which our conduct is directed merely by external impressions we resemble the inferior animals; we differ from them in the greater facility with which we arrange our sensations, and compare, prefer and judge.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

Out of a single sensation a great variety of reflections may

be generated. Let the thing perceived be a material substance of certain regular dimensions. I perceive that it has an upper and a lower surface, I can therefore conceive of it as divided. I can conceive of the parts into which it is formed as moving towards and from each other, and hence I acquire the ideas of distance and space. I can conceive of them as striking against each other, and hence I derive the notion of impenetrability, gravity and momentum, the slowness, rapidity and direction of motion. Let the sensation be a pain in the head. I am led to reflect upon its causes, its seat, the structure of the parts in which it resides, the inconvenience it imposes, the consequences with which it may be attended, the remedies that may be applied and their effects, whether external or internal, material or intellectual.

Fertility of reflection.

It is true that the infant and inexperienced mind cannot thus analyse and conjure up dissertations of philosophy out of its most trivial sensations. Such a capacity infers a long series of preceding impressions. Mind is in its infancy nearly what these philosophers describe, the creature of contingencies. But the farther it advances, the more it individualises. Each man has habits and prejudices that are properly his own. He lives in a little universe of his own creating, or he communicates with the omnipresent and eternal volume of truth. With these he compares the successive perceptions of his mind, and upon these depend the conclusions he draws and the conduct he observes. Hence it inevitably follows, that physical causes, though of some consequence in the history of man, sink into nothing, when compared with the great and inexpressible operations of reflection. They are the prejudices we conceive or the judgments we form, our apprehensions of truth and falshood, that constitute the true basis of distinction between man and man. The difference between savage and savage indeed, in the first generation of the human species and in perfect solitude, can only be ascribed to the different impressions made upon their senses. But this difference would be almost imperceptible. The ideas of wisdom and folly would never have entered the human mind, if men, like beasts, derived neither good nor evil from the reflections and discoveries of their companions and ancestors.

Physical causes in the first instance

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.
superior, afterwards moral.

Hence we are furnished with an answer to the analogical argument from the considerable effects that physical causes appear to produce upon brutes. "Breed for example appears to be of unquestionable importance to the character and qualifications of horses and dogs; why should we not suppose this or certain other brute and occult causes to be equally efficacious in the case of men? How comes it that the races of animals perhaps never degenerate, if carefully cultivated; at the same time that we have no security against the wisest philosopher's begetting a dunce?"

Objection from the effect of breed in animals.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

I answer, that the existence of physical causes cannot be controverted. In the case of man their efficacy is swallowed up in the superior importance of reflection and science. In animals on the contrary they are left almost alone. If a race of negroes were taken, and maintained each man from his infancy, except so far as was necessary for the propagation of the species, in solitude; or even if they were excluded from an

acquaintance with the improvements and imaginations of their ancestors, though permitted the society of each other, the operation of breed might perhaps be rendered as conspicuous among them, as in the different classes of horses and dogs. But the ideas they would otherwise receive from their parents and civilised or half-civilised neighbours would be innumerable: and, if the precautions above mentioned were unobserved, all parallel between the two cases would cease.

Such is the character of man considered as an individual. He is operated upon by exterior causes immediately, producing certain effects upon him independently of the exercise of reason; and he is operated upon by exterior causes mediately, their impressions furnishing him with materials for reflection, and as

Conclusion.

suming the form of motives to act or to refrain from acting. But the latter of these, at least so far as relates to man in a civilised state, may stand for the whole. He that would change the character of the individual, would miserably misapply his efforts, if he principally sought to effect this purpose by the operations of heat and cold, dryness and moisture upon the animal frame. The true instruments of moral influence, are desire and aversion, punishment and reward, the exhibition of general truth, and the development of those punishments and rewards, which wisdom and error by the very nature of the thing constantly bring along with them.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Part II.

OF NATIONAL CHARACTERS

character of the priesthood.—all nations capable of liberty.—the assertion illustrated.—experience favours these reasonings.—means of introducing liberty.

AS is the character of the individual, so may we expect to find it with nations and great bodies of men. The operations of law and political institution will be important and interesting, the operations of climate trifling and unworthy of notice. Thus there are particular professions, such as that of the priesthood, which must always operate to the production of a particular character.

Priests are upon all occasions accustomed to have their opinions listened to with implicit deference; they will therefore be imperious, dogmatical and impatient of opposition. Their success with mankind depends upon the opinion of their superior innocence; they will therefore be particularly anxious about appearances, their deportment will be grave and their manners formal. The frank and ingenuous sallies of mind they will be obliged to suppress; the errors and irregularities into which they may be drawn they will be studious to conceal. They are obliged at set intervals to assume the exterior of an ardent devotion; but it is impossible that this should at all times be free from occasional coldness and distraction. Their importance is connected with their real or supposed mental superiority over the rest of mankind; they must therefore be patrons of prejudice and implicit faith. Their prosperity depends upon the reception of particular opinions in the world; they must therefore be enemies to freedom of enquiry; they must have a bias upon their minds impressed by something different from the force of evidence. Particular moral causes may in some instances limit, perhaps supersede the influence of general ones, and render some men superior to the character of their profession; but, exclusively of such exceptions, priests of all religions, of all climates and of all ages will have a striking similarity of manners and disposition. In the same manner we may rest assured that free men in whatever country will be firm, vigorous and spirited in proportion to their freedom, and that vassals and slaves will be ignorant, servile and unprincipled.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.
Character of the
priesthood.

The truth of this axiom has indeed been pretty universally admitted; but it has been affirmed to be “impossible to establish a free government in certain warm and effeminate climates.” To enable us to judge of the reasonableness of this affirmation, let us consider what process would be necessary in order to introduce a free government into any country.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.
All nations capable of
liberty.

The answer to this question is to be found in the answer to that other, whether freedom have any real and solid advantages over slavery? If it have, then our mode of proceeding respecting it ought to be exactly parallel to that we should employ in

recommending any other benefit. If I would persuade a man to accept a great estate, supposing that possession to be a real advantage; if I would induce him to select for his companion a beautiful and accomplished woman, or for his friend a wise, a brave and disinterested man; if I would persuade him to prefer ease to pain, and gratification to torture, what more is necessary, than that I should inform his understanding, and make him see these things in their true and genuine colours? Should I find it necessary to enquire first of what climate he was a native, and whether that were favourable to the possession of a great estate, a fine woman, or a generous friend?

The advantages of liberty over slavery are not less real, though unfortunately they are less palpable, than in the cases just enumerated. Every man has a confused sense of these advantages, but he has been taught to believe that men would tear each other to pieces, if they had not priests to direct their consciences, and lords to consult for their subsistence, and kings to

steer them in safety through the inexplicable dangers of the political ocean. But whether they be misled by these or other prejudices, whatever be the fancied terror that induces them quietly to submit to have their hands bound behind them, and the scourge vibrated over their heads, all these are questions of reason. Truth may be presented to them in such irresistible evidence, perhaps by such just degrees familiarised to their apprehension, as ultimately to conquer the most obstinate prepossessions. Let the press find its way into Persia or Indostan, let the political truths discovered by the best of the European sages be transfused into their language, and it is impossible that a few solitary converts should not be made. It is the property of truth to spread; and, exclusively of great national convulsions, its advocates in each succeeding age will be somewhat more numerous than in that which went before. The causes, which suspend its progress, arise, not from climate, but from the watchful and intolerant jealousy of despotic sovereigns.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

Let us suppose then that the majority of a nation by however slow a progress are convinced of the desirableness, or, which amounts to the same, the practicability of freedom. The supposition would be parallel, if we were to imagine ten thousand men of sound intellect, shut up in a madhouse, and superintended by a set of three or four keepers. Hitherto they have been persuaded, for what absurdity has been too great for human intellect

The assertion illustrated

to entertain? that they were destitute of reason, and that the superintendence under which they were placed was necessary for their preservation. They have therefore submitted to whips and straw and bread and water, and perhaps imagined this tyranny to be a blessing. But a suspicion is at length by some means propagated among them, that all they have hitherto endured has been an imposition. The suspicion spreads, they reflect, they reason, the idea is communicated from one to another through the chinks of their cells, and at certain times when the vigilance of their keepers has not precluded them from the pleasures of mutual society. It becomes the clear perception, the settled persuasion of the majority of the persons confined.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

What will be the consequence of this opinion? Will the influence of climate prevent them from embracing the obvious means of their happiness? Is there any human

understanding that will not perceive a truth like this, when forcibly and repeatedly presented? Is there a mind that will conceive no indignation at so horrible a tyranny? In reality the chains fall off of themselves, when the magic of opinion is dissolved. When a great majority of any society are persuaded to secure any benefit to themselves, there is no need of tumult or violence to effect it. The effort would be to resist reason, not to obey it. The prisoners are collected in their common hall, and the keepers inform them that it is time to return to their cells. They have no longer the power to obey. They look at the impotence of their late masters, and smile at their presumption. They quietly leave the mansion where they were hitherto immured, and partake of the blessings of light and air like other men.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

Let us compare this theory with the history of mankind. If the theory be true, we may expect to find the inhabitants of neighbouring provinces in different states, widely discriminated by the influence of government, and little assimilated by resemblance of climate. Thus the Gascons are the gayest people in all France; but the moment we pass the Pyrenees, we find the serious and saturnine character of the Spaniard. Thus the Athenians were lively, penetrating and ingenious, but the Thebans unpolished, phlegmatic and dull.—It would be reasonable to expect that different races of men, intermixed with each other, but differently governed, would afford a strong and visible contrast. Thus the Turks are brave, open and sincere, but the modern Greeks mean, cowardly and deceitful.—Wandering tribes closely connected among themselves, and having little sympathy with the people with whom they reside, may be expected to have great similarity of manners. Their situation renders them conspicuous, the faults of individuals reflect dishonour upon the whole, and their manners will be particularly sober and reputable, unless they should happen to labour under so peculiar an odium as to render all endeavour after reputation fruitless. Thus the Armenians in the East are as universally distinguished among the nations with whom they reside, as the Jews in Europe; but the Armenians are as much noted for probity, as the Jews for extortion.—What resemblance is there between the ancient and the modern Greeks, between the old Romans and the present inhabitants of Italy, between the Gauls and the French? Diodorus Siculus describes the Gauls as particularly given to taciturnity, and Aristotle affirms that they are the only warlike nation who are negligent of women.

Experience favours these reasonings

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

If on the contrary climate were principally concerned in forming the characters of nations, we might expect to find heat and cold producing an extraordinary effect upon men, as they do upon plants and inferior animals. But the reverse of this appears to be the fact. Is it supposed that the neighbourhood of the sun renders men gay, fantastic and ingenious? While the French, the Greeks and the Persians have been remarkable for their gaiety, the Spaniards, the Turks and the Chinese are not less distinguished by the seriousness of their deportment. It was the opinion of the ancients that the northern nations were incapable of civilisation and improvement; but the moderns have found that the English are not inferior in literary eminence to any nation in the world. Is it asserted, that the northern nations are more hardy and courageous, and that conquest has usually travelled from that to the opposite quarter? It would have been

truer to say that conquest is usually made by poverty upon plenty. The Turks, who from the deserts of Tartary invaded the fertile provinces of the Roman empire, met the Sara cens half way, who were advancing with similar views from the no less dreary deserts of Arabia. In their extreme perhaps heat and cold may determine the characters of nations, of the negroes for example on one side and the Laplanders on the other. Not but that in this very instance much may be ascribed to the wretchedness of a sterile climate on the one hand, and to the indolence consequent upon a spontaneous fertility on the other. As to what is more than this, the remedy has not yet been discovered. Physical causes have already appeared to be powerful, till moral ones can be brought into operation.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

Has it been alledged that carnivorous nations are endowed with the greatest courage? The Swedes, whose nutriment is meagre and sparing, have ranked with the most distinguished modern nations in the operations of war.

It is usually said, that northern nations are most addicted to wine, and southern to women. Admitting this observation in its full force, it would only prove that climate may operate upon the grosser particles of our frame, not that it influences those finer organs upon which the operations of intellect depend. But the truth of the first of these remarks may well be doubted. The Greeks appear to have been sufficiently addicted to the pleasures of the bottle. Among the Persians no character was more coveted than that of a hard drinker. It is easy to obtain any thing of the negroes, even their wives and children, in exchange for liquor.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

As to women the circumstance may be accounted for from moral causes. The heat of the climate obliges both sexes to go half naked. The animal arrives sooner at maturity in hot countries. And both these circumstances produce vigilance and jealousy, causes which inevitably tend to inflame the passions*.

The result of these reasonings is of the utmost importance to him who speculates upon principles of government. It is of little consequence what discoveries may be made in moral and political science, if, when we have ascertained most accurately what are the intellectual requisites that lead to wisdom and virtue, a blind and capricious principle is to intrude itself, and taint all our conclusions. Accordingly there have been writers on the subject of government, who, admitting, and even occasionally declaiming with enthusiasm upon the advantages of liberty and the equal claims of mankind to every social benefit, have yet concluded that the corruptions of despotism and the usurpations of aristocracy were congenial to certain ages and divisions of the world, and under proper limitations entitled to our approbation.

Means of introducing liberty

But this hypothesis will be found incapable of holding out against a moment's serious reflection. Can there be any state of mankind that renders them incapable of the exercise of reason? Can there be a period in which it is necessary to hold the human species in a condition of pupillage? If there be, it seems but reasonable that their superintendents and guardians, as in the case of infants of another sort, should provide for the means of

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

their subsistence without calling upon them for the exertions of manual industry. Wherever men are competent to look the first duties of humanity in the face, and to provide for their defence against the invasions of hunger and the inclemencies of the sky, there they will out of all doubt be found equally capable of every other exertion that may be necessary to their security and welfare. Present to them a constitution which shall put them into a simple and intelligible method of directing their own affairs, adjudging their contests among themselves, and cherishing in their bosoms a manly sense of dignity, equality and independence, and you need not doubt that prosperity and virtue will be the result.

The real enemies of liberty in any country are not the people, but those higher orders who profit by a contrary system. Infuse just views of society into a certain number of the liberally educated and reflecting members; give to the people guides and instructors; and the business is done. This however is not to be accomplished but in a gradual manner, as will more fully appear in the sequel. The error lies, not in tolerating the worst forms of government for a time, but in supposing a change impracticable, and not incessantly looking forward to its accomplishment.

BOOK I. CHAP. VII.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. VIII.

OF THE OBJECTION TO THESE PRINCIPLES FROM THE INFLUENCE OF LUXURY

the objection stated.—source of this objection.—refuted from mutability—from mortality—from sympathy—from the nature of truth.—the probability of perseverance considered.

THERE is another proposition relative to the subject, which is less to be considered as an assertion distinct in itself, than as a particular branch of that which has just been discussed; I mean the proposition which affirms, “that nations like individuals are subject to the phenomena of youth and old age, and that, when a people by luxury and depravation of manners have sunk into decrepitude, it is not in the power of legislation to restore them to vigour and innocence.”

BOOK I. CHAP.
VIII. The objection
stated

This idea has partly been founded upon the romantic notions of pastoral life and the golden age. Innocence is not virtue. Virtue demands the active employment of an ardent mind in the promotion of the general good. No man can be eminently virtuous, who is not accustomed to an extensive range of reflection. He must see all the benefits to arise from a disinterested proceeding, and must understand the proper method of producing those benefits. Ignorance, the slothful habits and limited views of uncultivated life have not in them more of true virtue, though they may be more harmless, than luxury, vanity and extravagance. Individuals of exquisite feeling, whose disgust has been excited by the hardened selfishness or the unblushing corruption which have prevailed in their own times, have resorted in imagination to the forests of Norway or the bleak and uncomfortable Highlands of Scotland in search of a purer race of mankind. This imagination has been the offspring of disappointment, not the dictate of reason and philosophy.

Source of this
objection

BOOK I. CHAP.
VIII.

It may be true, that ignorance is nearer than prejudice to the reception of wisdom, and that the absence of virtue is a condition more hopeful than the presence of its opposite. In this case it would have been juster to compare a nation sunk in luxury, to an individual with confirmed habits of wrong, than to an individual whom a debilitated constitution was bringing fast to the grave. But neither would that comparison have been fair and equitable.

The condition of nations is more fluctuating, and will be found less obstinate in its resistance to a consistent endeavour for their improvement, than that of individuals. In nations some of their members will be less confirmed in error than others. A certain number will be only in

Refuted from
mutability:

a very small degree indisposed to listen to the voice of truth. This number will perpetually increase. Every new convert will be the means of converting others. In proportion as the body of disciples is augmented, the modes of attack upon the prejudices of others will be varied, and suited to the variety of men's tempers and prepossessions.

BOOK I. CHAP.
VIII.

Add to this that generations of men are perpetually going off the stage, while other generations succeed. The next generation will not have so many prejudices to subdue. Suppose a despotic nation by some revolution in its affairs to become possessed of a free constitution. The children of the present race will be bred in more firm and independent habits of thinking; the suppleness, the timidity and the vicious dexterity of their fathers will give place to an erect mien, and a clear and decisive judgment. The partial and imperfect change of character which was introduced at first, will in the succeeding age become more unalloyed and complete.

from mortality:

Lastly, the power of social institutions changing the character of nations is very different from and infinitely greater than any power which can ordinarily be brought to bear upon a solitary individual. Large bodies of men, when once they have been enlightened and persuaded, act with more vigour than solitary individuals. They animate the mutual exertions of each other, and the united forces of example and shame urge them to perseverance. The case is not of that customary sort where the power of reason only is tried in curing any person of his errors; but is as if he should be placed in an entirely new situation. His habits are broken through, and his motives of action changed.

from sympathy:

BOOK I. CHAP.
VIII.

Instead of being perpetually recalled to vicious practices by the recurrence of his former connections, the whole society receives an impulse from the same cause that acts upon any individual. New ideas are suggested, and the surprise of novelty conspires with the approbation of truth to prevent men from falling back into imbecility and languor.

The question may in reality be reduced to an enquiry, whether the human understanding can be made the recipient of truth, whether it be possible for an effort so strenuous to exist as to make men aware of their true interests. For let this be granted, and the consequence is inevitable. It has already sufficiently appeared, that whatever is politically right or politically wrong, must be in all cases of no trivial consequence to the welfare of mankind. Monarchy for example will by all men be acknowledged to be attended with many disadvantages. It acts upon insufficient and partial information, it generates intrigue, corruption, adulation and servility. If it could be proved, that it produced no advantages in equal proportion, and that its abolition would not lead to mischief, anarchy and disorder, is there a nation upon the face of the earth to whom these propositions were rendered palpable, that would endure to submit to it? Is there a nation upon the face of the earth, that would submit to the impositions of its administration, the wars it occasions,

from the nature of
truth

and the lavish revenues by which it is maintained, if they knew it to be merely an excrescence and a disease in the order of society?

BOOK I. CHAP.
VIII.

But it has been farther alledged, that, even should a luxurious nation be prompted by intolerable grievances and notorious usurpation to assert the just principles of human society, they would be unable to perpetuate them, and would soon be led back by their evil habits to their former vices and corruption: that is, they would be capable of the heroic energy that should expel the usurper, but not of the moderate resolution that should prevent his return. They would rouse themselves so far from their lethargy as to assume a new character and enter into different views; but, after having for some time acted upon their convictions, they would suddenly become incapable of understanding the truth of their principles and feeling their influence.

The probability of
perseverance
considered

Men always act upon their apprehensions of preferableness. There are few errors of which they are guilty, which may not be resolved into a narrow and inadequate view of the alternative presented for their choice. Present pleasure may appear more certain and eligible than distant good. But they never choose evil as apprehended to be evil. Wherever a clear and unanswerable notion of any subject is presented to their view, a correspondent action or course of actions inevitably follows. Having thus gained one step in the acquisition of truth, it cannot easily be conceived of as lost. A body of men, having detected the injurious consequences of an evil under which they have long laboured, and having shaken it off, will scarcely voluntarily restore the mischief they have annihilated. Nothing can reconcile them to the revival of falshood, which does not obliterate their present conviction of truth.

BOOK I. CHAP.
VIII.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

An
ENQUIRY
Concerning
POLITICAL JUSTICE

Book I.
PRINCIPLES OF SOCIETY

CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTION

nature of the enquiry—mode of pursuing it.—distinction between society and government.

MR. Locke begins his celebrated Treatise of Government with a refutation of the patriarchal scheme of sir Robert Filmer; and, having thus cleared his ground, proceeds to observe, that “he, that will not give just occasion to think that all government in the world is the product only of force and violence, and that men live together by no other rules but that of beasts,

BOOK II. CHAP. I.
Nature of the enquiry

must of necessity find out another rise of government, and another original of political power*.” Accordingly he proceeds through the greater part of his treatise to reason abstractedly upon the probable history of the early ages of mankind, and concludes that no legitimate government could be built upon any other foundation than that of an original contract.

BOOK II. CHAP. I.

It is to be suspected that this great man, friend as he was to the liberty and the interests of mankind, intrepid and sagacious in his search after truth, has been guilty of an oversight in the first step of the investigation.

There are two modes, according to which we may enquire into the origin of society and government. We may either examine them historically, that is, consider in what manner they have or ought to have begun, as Mr. Locke has done; or we may examine them philosophically, that is, consider the moral principles upon which they depend. The first of these subjects is not without its use; but the second is of a higher order and more essential importance. The first is a question of form; the second of substance. It would be of trivial consequence practically considered, from what source any form of society flowed, and by what mode its principles were sanctioned, could we be always secure of their conformity to the dictates of truth and justice.

Mode of pursuing it

It is farther necessary before we enter upon the subject carefully

to distinguish between society and government. Men associated at first for the sake of mutual assistance. They did not foresee that any restraint would be necessary, to regulate the conduct of individual members of the society, towards each other, or towards the whole. The necessity of restraint grew out of the errors and perverseness of a few. An acute writer has expressed this idea with peculiar felicity. "Society and government," says he, "are different in themselves, and have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness. Society is in every state a blessing; government even in its best state but a necessary evil*."

BOOK II. CHAP. I.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. II.

OF JUSTICE

connection of politics and morals.—extent and meaning of justice. —subject of justice: mankind.—its distribution measured by the capacity of its subject—by his usefulness.—family affection consideredx2014gratitudeconsidonsidered.—objections: from ignorance—from utility.—an exception stated.—degrees of justice.—application.—idea of political justice.

FROM what has been said it appears, that the subject of the present enquiry is strictly speaking a department of the science of morals. Morality is the source from which its fundamental axioms must be drawn, and they will be made somewhat clearer in the present instance, if we assume the term justice as a general appellation for all moral duty.

BOOK II. CHAP. II.
Connection of politics and morals

That this appellation is sufficiently expressive of the subject will appear, if we consider for a moment mercy, gratitude, temperance, or any of those duties which in looser speaking are contradistinguished from justice. Why should I pardon this criminal, remunerate this favour, abstain from this indulgence? If it

Extent and meaning of justice

partake of the nature of morality, it must be either right or wrong, just or unjust. It must tend to the benefit of the individual, either without intrenching upon, or with actual advantage to the mass of individuals. Either way it benefits the whole, because individuals are parts of the whole. Therefore to do it is just, and to forbear it is unjust. If justice have any meaning, it is just that I should contribute every thing in my power to the benefit of the whole.

BOOK II. CHAP. II.

Considerable light will probably be thrown upon our investigation, if, quitting for the present the political view, we examine justice merely as it exists among individuals. Justice is a rule of conduct originating in the connection of one percipient being with another. A comprehensive maxim which has been laid down upon the subject is, “that we should love our neighbour as ourselves.” But this maxim, though possessing considerable merit as a popular principle, is not modelled with the strictness of philosophical accuracy.

Subject of justice: mankind

In a loose and general view I and my neighbour are both of us men; and of consequence entitled to equal attention. But in reality it is probable that one of us is a being of more worth and importance than the other. A man is of more worth than a beast; because, being possessed of higher faculties, he is capable of a more refined and genuine happiness. In the same manner

Its distribution measured by the capacity of its subject:

BOOK II. CHAP. II.

the illustrious archbishop of Cambay was of more worth than his chambermaid, and there are few of us that would hesitate to pronounce, if his palace were in flames, and the life of only one of them could be preserved, which of the two ought to be preferred.

But there is another ground of preference, beside the private consideration of one of them being farther removed from the state of a mere animal. We are not connected with one or two percipient beings, but with a society, a nation, and in some sense with the whole family of mankind. Of consequence that life ought to be preferred which will be most conducive to the general good. In saving the life of Fenelon, suppose at the moment when he was conceiving the project of his immortal Telemachus, I should be promoting the benefit of thousands, who have been cured by the perusal of it of some error, vice and consequent unhappiness. Nay, my benefit would extend farther than this, for every individual thus cured has become a better member of society, and has contributed in his turn to the happiness, the information and improvement of others.

by his usefulness

Supposing I had been myself the chambermaid, I ought to have chosen to die, rather than that Fenelon should have died. The life of Fenelon was really preferable to that of the chambermaid. But understanding is the faculty that perceives the truth of this and similar propositions; and justice is the principle that regulates my conduct accordingly. It would have been just in the chambermaid to have preferred the archbishop to herself. To have done otherwise would have been a breach of justice.

BOOK II. CHAP. II.

Supposing the chambermaid had been my wife, my mother or my benefactor. This would not alter the truth of the proposition. The life of Fenelon would still be more valuable than that of the chambermaid; and justice, pure, unadulterated justice, would still have preferred that which was most valuable. Justice would have taught me to save the life of Fenelon at the expence of the other. What magic is there in the pronoun “my,” to overturn the decisions of everlasting truth? My wife or my mother may be a fool or a prostitute, malicious, lying or dishonest. If they be, of what consequence is it that they are mine?

Family affection considered

“But my mother endured for me the pains of child bearing, and nourished me in the helplessness of infancy.” When she first subjected herself to the necessity of these cares, she was probably influenced by no particular motives of benevolence to her future offspring. Every voluntary benefit however entitles the bestower to some kindness and retribution. But why so? Because a voluntary benefit is an evidence of benevolent intention, that is, of virtue. It is the disposition of the mind, not the external action, that entitles to respect. But the merit of this disposition is equal, whether the benefit was conferred upon me or upon another. I and another man cannot both be right in preferring our own individual benefactor, for no man can be at the same time both better and worse than his neighbour. My benefactor ought to be esteemed, not because he bestowed a benefit upon me, but because he bestowed it upon a human being. His desert will be in exact proportion to the degree,

Gratitude considered

BOOK II. CHAP. II.

in which that human being was worthy of the distinction conferred. Thus every view of the subject brings us back to the consideration of my neighbour's moral worth and his importance to the general weal, as the only standard to determine the treatment to which he is entitled. Gratitude therefore, a principle which has so often been the theme of the moralist and the poet, is no part either of justice or virtue. By gratitude I understand a sentiment, which would lead me to prefer one man to another, from some other consideration than that of his superior usefulness or worth: that is, which would make something true to me (for example this preferableness), which cannot be true to another man, and is not true in itself* .

It may be objected, "that my relation, my companion, or my benefactor will of course in many instances obtain an uncommon portion of my regard: for, not being universally capable of discriminating the comparative worth of different men, I shall inevitably judge most favourably of him, of whose virtues I have received the most unquestionable proofs; and thus shall be compelled to prefer the man of moral worth whom I know, to another who may possess, unknown to me, an essential superiority."

Objections:

from ignorance:

BOOK II. CHAP. II.

This compulsion however is founded only in the present imperfection of human nature. It may serve as an apology for my error, but can never turn error into truth. It will always remain contrary to the strict and inflexible decisions of justice. The difficulty of conceiving this is owing merely to our confounding the disposition from which an action is chosen, with the action itself. The disposition, that would prefer virtue to vice and a greater degree of virtue to a less, is undoubtedly a subject of approbation; the erroneous exercise of this disposition by which a wrong object is selected, if unavoidable, is to be deplored, but can by no colouring and under no denomination be converted into right.*

It may in the second place be objected, "that a mutual commerce of benefit tends to increase the mass of benevolent action, and that to increase the mass of benevolent action is to contribute to the general good." Indeed! Is the general good promoted by falsehood, by treating a man of one degree of worth, as if he had ten times that worth? or as if he were in any degree different from what he really is? Would not the most beneficial consequences result from a different plan; from my constantly and carefully enquiring into the deserts of all those with whom I am connected, and from their being sure, after a certain allowance for the fallibility of human judgment, of being treated by me exactly as they deserved? Who can tell what would be the effects of such a plan of conduct universally adopted?

from utility

BOOK II. CHAP. II.

There seems to be more truth in the argument, derived chiefly from the unequal distribution of property, in favour of my providing in ordinary cases for my wife and children, my brothers and relations, before I provide for strangers. As long as providing for individuals belongs to individuals, it seems as if there must be a certain distribution of the class needing

An exception stated

superintendence and supply among the class affording it, that each man may have his claim and resource. But this argument, if admitted at all, is to be admitted with great caution. It belongs only to ordinary cases; and cases of a higher order or a more urgent necessity will perpetually occur, in competition with which these will be altogether impotent. We must be severely scrupulous in measuring out the quantity of supply; and, with respect to money in particular, must remember how little is yet understood of the true mode of employing it for the public benefit.

Having considered the persons with whom justice is conversant, let us next enquire into the degree in which we are obliged to consult the good of others. And here I say, that it is just that I should do all the good in my power. Does any person in distress apply to me for relief? It is my duty to grant it, and I commit a breach of duty in refusing. If this principle be not of universal application, it is because, in conferring a benefit upon an individual, I may in some instances inflict an injury of superior magnitude upon myself or society. Now the same justice, that binds me to any individual of my fellow men, binds me to the whole. If, while I confer a benefit upon one man, it appear, in striking an equitable balance, that I am injuring the whole, my action ceases to be right and becomes absolutely wrong. But how much am I bound to do for the general weal, that is, for the benefit of the individuals of whom the whole is composed? Every thing in my power. What to the neglect of the means of my own existence? No; for I am myself a part of the whole. Beside, it will rarely happen but that the project of doing for others every thing in my power, will demand for its execution the preservation of my own existence; or in other words, it will rarely happen but that I can do more good in twenty years than in one. If the extraordinary case should occur in which I can promote the general good by my death, more than by my life, justice requires that I should be content to die. In all other cases, it is just that I should be careful to maintain my body and my mind in the utmost vigour, and in the best condition for service.*

Degrees of justice

BOOK II. CHAP. II.

I will suppose for example that it is right for one man to possess a greater portion of property than another, either as the fruit of his industry, or the inheritance of his ancestors. Justice obliges him to regard this property as a trust, and calls upon him maturely to consider in what manner it may best be employed for the increase of liberty, knowledge and virtue. He has no right to dispose of a shilling of it at the will of his caprice. So far from being entitled to well earned applause for having employed some scanty pittance in the service of philanthropy, he is in the eye of justice a delinquent if he withhold any portion from that service. Nothing can be more incontrovertible. Could that portion have been better or more worthily employed? That it could is implied in the very terms of the proposition. Then it was just it should have been so employed.—In the same manner as my property, I hold my person as a trust in behalf of mankind. I am bound to employ my talents, my understanding, my strength and my time for the production of the greatest quantity of general good. Such are the declarations of justice, so great is the extent of my duty.

BOOK II. CHAP. II.

But justice is reciprocal. If it be just that I should confer a benefit, it is just that another man should receive it, and, if I withhold from him that to which he is entitled, he may justly complain. My neighbour is in want of ten pounds that I can spare. There is no law of political institution that has been made to reach this case, and to transfer this property from me to him.

But in the eye of simple justice, unless it can be shewn that the money can be more beneficently employed, his claim is as complete, as if he had my bond in his possession, or had supplied me with goods to the amount.*

BOOK II. CHAP. II.

To this it has sometimes been answered, “that there is more than one person, that stands in need of the money I have to spare, and of consequence I must be at liberty to bestow it as I please.” I answer, if only one person offer himself to my knowledge or search, to me there is but one. Those others that I cannot find belong to other rich men to assist (rich men, I say, for every man is rich, who has more money than his just occasions demand), and not to me. If more than one person offer, I am obliged to balance their fitness, and conduct myself accordingly. It is scarcely possible to happen that two men shall be of exactly equal fitness, or that I shall be equally certain of the fitness of the one as of the other.

It is therefore impossible for me to confer upon any man a favour, I can only do him a right. Whatever deviates from the law of justice, even I will suppose in the too much done in favour of some individual or some part of the general whole, is so much subtracted from the general stock, is so much of absolute injustice.

The inference most clearly afforded by the preceding reasonings, is the competence of justice as a principle of deduction in all cases of moral enquiry. The reasonings themselves are rather of the nature of illustration and example, and any error that may be imputed to them in particulars, will not invalidate the general conclusion, the propriety of applying moral justice as a criterion in the investigation of political truth.

BOOK II. CHAP. II.
Application

Society is nothing more than an aggregation of individuals. Its claims and its duties must be the aggregate of their claims and duties, the one no more precarious and arbitrary than the other.

Idea of political
justice

What has the society a right to require from me? The question is already answered: every thing that it is my duty to do. Any thing more? Certainly not. Can they change eternal truth, or subvert the nature of men and their actions? Can they make it my duty to commit intemperance, to maltreat or assassinate my neighbour?—Again. What is it that the society is bound to do for its members? Every thing that can contribute to their welfare. But the nature of their welfare is defined by the nature of mind. That will most contribute to it, which enlarges the understanding, supplies incitements to virtue, fills us with a generous consciousness of our independence, and carefully removes whatever can impede our exertions.

Should it be affirmed, “that it is not in the power of any political system to secure to us these advantages,” the conclusion I am drawing will still be incontrovertible. It is bound to contribute

every thing it is able to these purposes, and no man was ever yet found hardy enough to affirm that it could do nothing. Suppose its influence in the utmost degree limited, there must be one method approaching nearer than any other to the desired object, and that method ought to be universally adopted. There is one thing that political institutions can assuredly do, they can avoid positively counteracting the true interests of their subjects. But all capricious rules and arbitrary distinctions do positively counteract them. There is scarcely any modification of society but has in it some degree of moral tendency. So far as it produces neither mischief nor benefit, it is good for nothing. So far as it tends to the improvement of the community, it ought to be universally adopted.

BOOK II. CHAP. II.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

APPENDIX, No. I. P. 87.

OF SUICIDE

motives of suicide: 1. escape from pain.—2. benevolence.—martyrdom considered.

THIS reasoning will explain to us the long disputed case of suicide. “Have I a right under any circumstances to destroy myself in order to escape from pain or disgrace?”

BOOK II. CHAP. II.
APPENDIX. Motives
of suicide.

Probably not. It is perhaps impossible to imagine a situation, that shall exclude the possibility of future life, vigour and usefulness.

1. Escape from pain

The motive assigned for escape is eminently trivial, to avoid pain, which is a small inconvenience; or disgrace, which is an imaginary evil. The example of fortitude in enduring them, if there were no other consideration, would probably afford a better motive for continuing to live.

“Is there then no case in which suicide is a virtue?” What shall we think of the reasoning of Lycurgus, who, when he determined

2. Benevolence

upon a voluntary death, remarked, “that all the faculties a rational being possessed were capable of a moral use, and that, after having spent his life in the service of his country, a man ought, if possible, to render his death a source of additional benefit?”

This was the motive of the suicide of Codrus, Leonidas and Decius. If the same motive prevailed in the much admired suicide of Cato, if he were instigated by reasons purely benevolent,

it is impossible not to applaud his intention, even if he were mistaken in the application.

BOOK II. CHAP. II.
Appendix

The difficulty is to decide in any instance whether the recourse to a voluntary death can overbalance the usefulness I may exert in twenty or thirty years of additional life. But surely it would be precipitate to decide that there is no such instance. There is a proverb which affirms, “that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” It is commonly supposed that Junius Brutus did right in putting his sons to death in the first year of the Roman republic, and that this action contributed more than any other cause, to generate that energy and virtue for which his country was afterwards so eminently distinguished. The death of Cato produced an effect somewhat similar to this. It was dwelt on with admiration by all the lovers of virtue under the subsequent tyrants of Rome. It seemed to be the lamp from which they caught the sacred flame. Who can tell how much it has contributed to revive that flame in after ages, when it seemed to have been so long extinct?

Let it be observed that all martyrs [Editor: illegible Greek word] are suicides by the very signification of the term. They die for a testimony [Editor: illegible Greek word]; that is, they have a motive for dying. But motives respect only our own voluntary acts, not the violence put upon us by another.

Martyrdom
considered

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

APPENDIX, No. II.

OF DUELLING

motives of duelling: 1. revenge.—2. reputation for courage.—fallacy of this motive.—objection answered.—illustration.

IT may be proper in this place to bestow a moment's consideration upon the trite, but very important case of duelling. A very short reflection will suffice to set it in its true light.

BOOK II. CHAP. II.
Appendix. Motives of duelling

This detestable practice was originally invented by barbarians for the gratification of revenge. It was probably at that time thought a very happy project for reconciling the odiousness of malignity with the gallantry of courage.

1. Revenge

But in this light it is now generally given up. Men of the best understanding who lend it their sanction, are unwillingly induced to do so, and engage in single combat merely that their reputation may sustain no slander.

2. Reputation for courage

Which of these two actions is the truest test of courage: the engaging in a practice which our judgment disapproves, because we cannot submit to the consequences of following that judgment; or the doing what we believe to be right, and cheerfully encountering all the consequences that may be annexed to the

Fallacy of this motive

practice of virtue? With what patience can a man of virtue think of cutting off the life of a fellow mortal, or of putting an abrupt close to all the generous projects he may himself conceive for the benefit of others, merely because he has not firmness enough to awe impertinence and falshood into silence?

BOOK II. CHAP. II.
Appendix.

“But the refusing a duel is an ambiguous action. Cowards may pretend principle to shelter themselves from a danger they dare not meet.”

Objection

This is partly true and partly false. There are few actions indeed that are not ambiguous, or that with the same general outline may not proceed from different motives. But the manner of doing them will sufficiently shew the principle from which they spring.

Answered

He, that would break through an universally received custom because he believes it to be wrong, must no doubt arm himself with fortitude. The point in which we chiefly fail, is in not accurately understanding our own intentions, and taking care beforehand to free ourselves from any alloy of weakness and error. He, who comes forward with no

Illustration

other idea in his mind but that of rectitude, and who expresses, with the simplicity and firmness which full conviction never fails to inspire, the views with which he is impressed, is in no danger of being mistaken for a coward. If he hesitate, it is because he has not an idea perfectly clear of the sentiment he intends to convey. If he be in any degree embarrassed, it is because he has not a feeling sufficiently generous and intrepid of the guilt of the action in which he is pressed to engage.

BOOK II. CHAP. II.
Appendix.

If there be any meaning in courage, its first ingredient must be the daring to speak the truth at all times, to all persons, and in every possible situation. What is it but the want of courage that should prevent me from saying, "Sir, I ought to refuse your challenge. What I ought to do, that I dare do. Have I injured you? I will readily and without compulsion repair my injustice to the uttermost mite. Have you misconstrued me? State to me the particulars, and doubt not that what is true I will make appear to be true. Thus far I will go. But, though I should be branded for a coward by all mankind, I will not repair to a scene of deliberate murder. I will not do an act that I know to be flagitious. I will exercise my judgment upon every proposition that comes before me; the dictates of that judgment I will speak; and upon them I will form my conduct." He that holds this language with a countenance in unison with his words, will never be suspected of acting from the impulse of fear.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. III.

OF DUTY

a difficulty stated.—of absolute and practical virtue.—impropriety of this distinction.—universality of what is called practical virtue—instanced in robbery—in religious fanaticism.—the quality of an action distinct from the disposition with which it is performed—farther difficulty.—meaning of the term, duty.—application.—inferences.

THERE is a difficulty of considerable magnitude as to the subject of the preceding chapter, founded upon the difference which may exist between abstract justice and my apprehensions of justice. When I do an act, wrong in itself, but which as to all the materials of judging extant to my understanding appears to be right, is my conduct virtuous or vicious?

BOOK II. CHAP. III.
A difficulty stated

Certain moralists have introduced a distinction upon this head between absolute and practical virtue. “There is one species of virtue,” they say, “which rises out of the nature of things and is immutable, and another which rises out of the views extant to my understanding. Thus for example suppose, I ought to worship Jesus Christ; but, having been bred in the religion of Mahomet, I ought to adhere to that religion, as long as its evidences shall appear to me conclusive. I am impannelled upon a jury to try a man arraigned for murder, and who is really innocent. Abstractedly considered, I ought to acquit him. But I am unacquainted with his innocence, and evidence is adduced such as to form the strongest presumption of his guilt. Demonstration in such cases is not to be attained; I am obliged in every concern of human life to act upon presumption; I ought therefore to convict him.”

Of absolute and
practical virtue

BOOK II. CHAP. III.

It may be doubted however whether any good purpose is likely to be answered by employing the terms of abstract science in this versatile and uncertain manner. Morality is, if any thing can be, fixed and immutable; and there must surely be some strange deception that should induce us to give to an action eternally and unchangeably wrong, the epithets of rectitude, duty and virtue.

Impropriety of this
distinction

Nor have these moralists been thoroughly aware to what extent this admission would carry them. The human mind is incredibly subtle in inventing an apology for that to which its inclination leads. Nothing is so rare as pure and unmingled hypocrisy. There is no action of our lives which we were not ready at the time of adopting it to justify, unless so far as we were prevented by mere indolence and unconcern. There is scarcely any justification which we endeavour to pass upon others,

Universality of what
is called practical
virtue:

which we do not with tolerable success pass upon ourselves. The distinction therefore which is here set up would go near to prove that every action of every human being is entitled to the appellation of virtuous.

BOOK II. CHAP. III.

There is perhaps no man that cannot recollect the time when he secretly called in question the arbitrary division of property established in human society, and felt inclined to appropriate to his use any thing the possession of which appeared to him desirable. It is probably in some such way that men are usually influenced in the perpetration of robbery. They persuade themselves of the comparative inutility of the property to its present possessor, and the inestimable advantage that would attend it in their hands. They believe that the transfer ought to be made. It is of no consequence that they are not consistent in these views, that the impressions of education speedily recur to their minds, and that in a season of adversity they readily confess the wickedness of their proceeding. It is not less true that they did what at the moment they thought to be right.

instanced in robbery

But there is another consideration that seems still more decisive of the subject before us. The worst actions, the most contrary to abstract justice and utility, have frequently been done from the most conscientious motives. Clement, Ravailac, Damiens and Gerard had their minds deeply penetrated with anxiety for the eternal welfare of mankind. For these objects they sacrificed their ease, and cheerfully exposed themselves to tortures and death. It was benevolence probably that contributed to light the fires of Smithfield, and point the daggers of Saint Bartholomew. The inventors of the Gunpowder Treason were in general men remarkable for the sanctity of their lives and the severity of their manners. It is probable indeed, that some ambitious views, and some sentiments of hatred and abhorrence mixed with the benevolence and integrity of these persons. It is probable that no wrong action was ever committed from views entirely pure. But the deception they put upon themselves might nevertheless be complete. At all events their opinions upon the subject could not alter the real nature of the action.

in religious fanaticism

BOOK II. CHAP. III.

The true solution of the question lies in observing, that the disposition with which an action is adopted is one thing, and the action itself another. A right action may be done from a wrong disposition; in that case we approve the action, but condemn the actor. A wrong action may be done from a right disposition; in that case we condemn the action, but approve the actor. If the disposition by which a man is governed have a systematical tendency to the benefit of his species, he cannot fail to obtain our esteem, however mistaken he may be in his conduct.

The quality of an action distinct from the disposition with which it is performed

But what shall we say to the duty of a man under these circumstances? Calvin, we will suppose, was clearly and conscientiously persuaded that he ought to burn Servetus. Ought he to have burned him or not? "If he burned him, he did an action detestable in its own nature; if he refrained, he acted in

Farther difficulty

BOOK II. CHAP. III.

opposition to the best judgment of his own understanding as to a point of moral obligation.” It is absurd however to say, that it was in any sense his duty to burn him. The most that can be admitted is, that his disposition was virtuous, and that in the circumstances in which he was placed an action greatly to be deplored flowed from that disposition by invincible necessity.

Shall we say then that it was the duty of Calvin, who did not understand the principles of toleration, to act upon a truth of which he was ignorant? Suppose that a person is to be tried at York next week for murder, and that my evidence would acquit him. Shall we say that it was my duty to go to York, though I knew nothing of the matter? Upon the same principles we might affirm that it is my duty to go from London to York in half an hour, as the trial will come on within that time; the impossibility not being more real in one case than in the other. Upon the same principles we might affirm, that it is my duty to be impeccable, omniscient and almighty.

Duty is a term the use of which seems to be to describe the mode in which any being may best be employed for the general good. It is limited in its extent by the extent of the capacity of that being. Now capacity varies in its idea in proportion as we vary our view of the subject to which it belongs. What I am capable of, if you consider me merely as a man, is one thing; what I am capable of as a man of a deformed figure, of weak understanding, of superstitious prejudices, or as the case may happen, is another. So much cannot be expected of me under these disadvantages, as if they were absent. But, if this be the true definition of duty, it is absurd to suppose in any case that an action injurious to the general welfare can be classed in the rank of duties.

Meaning of the term,
duty

BOOK II. CHAP. III.

To apply these observations to the cases that have been stated. Ignorance, so far as it goes, completely annihilates capacity. As I was uninformed of the trial at York, I could not be influenced by any consideration respecting it. But it is absurd to say that it was my duty to neglect a motive with which I was unacquainted. If you alledge, “that Calvin was ignorant of the principles of toleration, and had no proper opportunity to learn them,” it follows that in burning Servetus he did not violate his duty, but it does not follow that it was his duty to burn him. Upon the supposition here stated duty is silent. Calvin was unacquainted with the principles of justice, and therefore could not practise them. The duty of no man can exceed his capacity; but then neither can in any case an act of injustice be of the nature of duty.

Application

There are certain inferences that flow from this view of the subject, which it may be proper to mention. Nothing is more common than for individuals and societies of men to alledge that they have acted to the best of their judgment, that they have done their duty, and therefore that their conduct, even should it prove to be mistaken, is nevertheless virtuous. This appears to be an error. An action, though done with the best intention in the world, may have nothing in it of the nature of virtue. In reality the most essential part of virtue consists in the incessantly seeking to inform ourselves more accurately upon the subject of utility and right. Whoever is

Inferences

BOOK II. CHAP. III.

greatly misinformed respecting them, is indebted for his error to a defect in his philanthropy and zeal.

Secondly, since absolute virtue may be out of the power of a human being, it becomes us in the mean time to lay the greatest stress upon a virtuous disposition, which is not attended with the same ambiguity. A virtuous disposition is of the utmost consequence, since it will in the majority of instances be productive of virtuous actions; since it tends, in exact proportion to the quantity of virtue, to increase our discernment and improve our understanding; and since, if it were universally propagated, it would immediately lead to the great end of virtuous actions, the purest and most exquisite happiness of intelligent beings. But a virtuous disposition is principally generated by the uncontrolled exercise of private judgment, and the rigid conformity of every man to the dictates of his conscience.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. IV.

OF THE EQUALITY OF MANKIND

physical equality.—objection.—answers.—moral equality.—how limited.—province of political justice.

THE equality of mankind is either physical or moral. Their physical equality may be considered either as it relates to the strength of the body or the faculties of the mind.

BOOK II. CHAP. IV.
Physical equality

This part of the subject has been exposed to cavil and objection. It has been said, “that the reverse of this equality is the result of our experience. Among the individuals of our species we actually find that there are not two alike. One man is strong and another weak. One man is wise and another foolish. All that exists in the world of the inequality of conditions is to be traced to this as their source. The strong man possesses power to subdue, and the weak stands in need of an ally to protect. The consequence is inevitable: the equality of conditions is a chimerical assumption, neither possible to be reduced into practice, nor desirable if it could be so reduced.”

Objection

Upon this statement two observations are to be made. First, this inequality was in its origin infinitely less than it is at present. In the uncultivated state of man diseases, effeminacy and luxury were little known, and of consequence the strength of every one much more nearly approached to the strength of his neighbour. In the uncultivated state of man the understandings of all were limited, their wants, their ideas and their views nearly upon a level. It was to be expected that in their first departure from this state great irregularities would introduce themselves; and it is the object of subsequent wisdom and improvement to mitigate these irregularities.

BOOK II. CHAP. IV.
Answers

Secondly, notwithstanding the incroachments that have been made upon the equality of mankind, a great and substantial equality remains. There is no such disparity among the human race as to enable one man to hold several other men in subjection, except so far as they are willing to be subject. All government is founded in opinion. Men at present live under any particular form, because they conceive it their interest to do so. One part indeed of a community or empire may be held in subjection by force; but this cannot be the personal force of their despot; it must be the force of another part of the community, who are of opinion that it is their interest to support his authority. Destroy this opinion, and the fabric which is built upon it falls to the ground. It follows therefore that all men are essentially independent.—So much for the physical equality.

The moral equality is still less open to reasonable exception. By moral equality I understand the propriety of applying one

BOOK II. CHAP. IV.
Moral equality

unalterable rule of justice to every case that may arise. This cannot be questioned but upon arguments that would subvert the very nature of virtue. "Equality," it has been affirmed, "will always be an unintelligible fiction, so long as the capacities of men shall be unequal, and their pretended claims have neither guarantee nor sanction by which they can be enforced*." But surely justice is sufficiently intelligible in its own nature, abstracted from the consideration whether it be or be not reduced into practice. Justice has relation to beings endowed with perception, and capable of pleasure and pain. Now it immediately results from the nature of such beings, independently of any arbitrary constitution, that pleasure is agreeable and pain odious, pleasure to be desired and pain to be obviated. It is therefore just and reasonable that such beings should contribute, so far as it lies in their power, to the pleasure and benefit of each other. Among pleasures some are more exquisite, more unalloyed and less precarious than others. It is just that these should be preferred.

From these simple principles we may deduce the moral equality of mankind. We are partakers of a common nature, and the same causes that contribute to the benefit of one contribute to the benefit of another. Our senses and faculties are of the same denomination. Our pleasures and pains will therefore be the same. We are all of us endowed with reason, able to compare, to judge and to infer. The improvement therefore which is to be desired for the one is to be desired for the other. We shall be provident for ourselves and useful to each other, in proportion as we rise above the atmosphere of prejudice. The same independence, the same freedom from any such restraint, as should prevent us from giving the reins to our own understanding, or from uttering upon all occasions whatever we think to be true, will conduce to the improvement of all. There are certain opportunities and a certain situation most advantageous to every human being, and it is just that these should be communicated to all, as nearly at least as the general economy will permit.

BOOK II. CHAP. IV.

There is indeed one species of moral inequality parallel to the physical inequality that has been already described. The treatment to which men are entitled is to be measured by their merits and their virtues. That country would not be the seat of wisdom and reason, where the benefactor of his species was considered in the same point of view as their enemy. But in reality this distinction, so far from being adverse to equality in any tenable sense, is friendly to it, and is accordingly known by the appellation of equity, a term derived from the same origin. Though in some sense an exception, it tends to the same

How limited.

purpose to which the principle itself is indebted for its value. It is calculated to infuse into every bosom an emulation of excellence. The thing really to be desired is the removing as much as possible arbitrary distinctions, and leaving to talents and virtue the field of exertion unimpaired. We should endeavour to afford to all the same opportunities and the same encouragement, and to render justice the common interest and choice.

BOOK II. CHAP. IV.
Province of political
justice

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. V.

RIGHTS OF MAN

the question stated.—foundation of society.—opposite rights impossible.—conclusion from these premises.—discretion considered.—rights of kings.—immoral consequences of the doctrine of rights of communities.—objections: 1. the right of mutual aid.—explanation.—origin of the term, right.—2. rights of private judgment and of the press.—explanation.—reasons of this limitation upon the functions of the community: 1. the inutility of attempting restraint.—2. its pernicious tendency.—conclusion.

THERE is no subject that has been discussed with more eagerness and pertinacity than the rights of man. Has he any rights, or has he none? Much may plausibly be alledged on both sides of this question; and in the conclusion those reasoners appear to express themselves with the greatest accuracy who embrace the negative.

BOOK II. CHAP. V.
The question stated

There is nothing that has been of greater disservice to the cause of truth, than the hasty and unguarded manner in which its advocates have sometimes defended it: and

BOOK II. CHAP. V.

it will be admitted to be peculiarly unfortunate, if the advocates on one side of this question should be found to have the greatest quantity of truth, while their adversaries have expressed themselves in a manner more consonant to reason and the nature of things. Where the question has been so extremely darkened by an ambiguous use of terms, it may at any rate be desirable to try, whether, by a patient and severe investigation of the first principles of political society, it may be placed in a light considerably different from the views of both parties.

Political society, as has already been observed, is founded in the principles of morality and justice. It is impossible for intellectual beings to be brought into coalition and intercourse, without a certain mode of conduct, adapted to their nature and connection, immediately becoming a duty incumbent on the parties concerned. Men would never have associated, if they had not imagined that in consequence of that association they would mutually conduce to the advantage and happiness of each other. This is the real purpose, the genuine basis of their intercourse; and, as far as this purpose is answered, so far does society answer the end of its institution.

Foundation of society

There is only one postulate more, that is necessary to bring us to a conclusive mode of reasoning upon this subject. Whatever is meant by the term right, for it will presently appear that the sense of the term itself has never been clearly understood, there can neither be opposite rights, nor rights and duties hostile

Opposite rights impossible

to each other. The rights of one man cannot clash with or be destructive of the rights of another; for this, instead of rendering

BOOK II. CHAP. V.

the subject an important branch of truth and morality, as the advocates of the rights of man certainly understand it to be, would be to reduce it to a heap of unintelligible jargon and inconsistency. If one man have a right to be free, another man cannot have a right to make him a slave; if one man have a right to inflict chastisement upon me, I cannot have a right to withdraw myself from chastisement; if my neighbour have a right to a sum of money in my possession, I cannot have a right to retain it in my pocket.—It cannot be less incontrovertible, that I have no right to omit what my duty prescribes.

From hence it inevitably follows that men have no rights.

By right, as the word is employed in this subject, has always been understood discretion, that is, a full and complete power of either doing a thing or omitting it, without the person's becoming liable to animadversion or censure from another, that is, in other words, without his incurring any degree of turpitude or guilt. Now in this sense I affirm that man has no rights, no discretionary power whatever.

Conclusion from these premises

It is commonly said, “that a man has a right to the disposal of his fortune, a right to the employment of his time, a right to the uncontrolled choice of his profession or pursuits.” But this can never be consistently affirmed till it can be shewn that he has no duties, prescribing and limiting his mode of proceeding in all these respects. My neighbour has just as much right to put an end to my existence with dagger or poison, as to deny me that pecuniary assistance without which I must starve, or as to deny me that assistance without which my intellectual attainments or my moral exertions will be materially injured. He has just as much right to amuse himself with burning my house or torturing my children upon the rack, as to shut himself up in a cell careless about his fellow men, and to hide “his talent in a napkin.”

Discretion considered

BOOK II. CHAP. V.

If men have any rights, any discretionary powers, they must be in things of total indifference, as whether I sit on the right or on the left side of my fire, or dine on beef to day or tomorrow. Even these rights are much fewer than we are apt to imagine, since before they can be completely established, it must be proved that my choice on one side or the other can in no possible way contribute to the benefit or injury of myself or of any other person in the world. Those must indeed be rights well worth the contending for, the very essence of which consists in their absolute nugatoriness and inutility.

In reality nothing can appear more wonderful to a careful enquirer, than that two ideas so incompatible as man and rights should ever have been associated together. Certain it is, that one of them must be utterly exclusive and annihilatory of the other.

Before we ascribe rights to man, we must conceive of him as a being endowed with intellect, and capable of discerning the differences and tendencies of things. But a being endowed with intellect, and capable of discerning the differences and tendencies of things, instantly becomes a moral being, and has duties incumbent on him to discharge: and duties and rights, as has already been shewn, are absolutely exclusive of each other.

BOOK II. CHAP. V.

It has been affirmed by the zealous advocates of liberty, “that princes and magistrates have no rights;” and no position can be more incontrovertible. There is no situation of their lives that has not its correspondent duties. There is no power intrusted to them that they are not bound to exercise exclusively for the public good. It is strange that persons adopting this principle did not go a step farther, and perceive that the same restrictions were applicable to subjects and citizens.

Rights of kings

Nor is the fallacy of this language more conspicuous than its immoral tendency. To this inaccurate and unjust use of the term right we owe it, that the miser, who accumulates to no end that which diffused would have conduced to the welfare of thousands, that the luxurious man who wallows in indulgence and sees numerous families around him pining in beggary, never fail to tell us of their rights, and to silence animadversion and quiet the censure of their own mind by reminding us, “that they

Immoral consequences of the doctrine of rights

came fairly into possession of their wealth, that they owe no debts, and that of consequence no man has authority to enquire into their private manner of disposing of that which is their own.” A great majority of mankind are conscious that they stand in need of this sort of defence, and are therefore very ready to combine against the insolent intruder, who ventures to enquire into “things that do not concern him.” They forget, that the wise man and the honest man, the friend of his country and his kind, is concerned for every thing by which they may be affected, and carries about with him a diploma, constituting him inquisitor general of the moral conduct of his neighbours, with a duty annexed to recal them to virtue, by every lesson that truth can enable him to read, and every punishment that plain speaking is competent to inflict.

BOOK II. CHAP. V.

It is scarcely necessary to add, that, if individuals have no rights, neither has society, which possesses nothing but what individuals have brought into a common stock. The absurdity of the common opinion, as applied to this subject, is still more glaring, if possible, than in the view in which we have already considered it. According to the usual sentiment every club assembling for any civil purpose, every congregation of religionists assembling for the worship of God, has a right to establish any provisions or ceremonies, no matter how ridiculous or detestable, provided they do not interfere with the freedom of others. Reason lies prostrate under their feet. They have a right to trample upon and insult her as they please. It is in the same spirit we have been told that every nation has a right to choose its form of government. A most acute, original and inestimable author was probably misled by the vulgar phraseology on this subject, when he asserted, that, “at a time when neither the people of France nor the national assembly were troubling themselves about the affairs of England or the English parliament, Mr. Burke's conduct was unpardonable in commencing an unprovoked attack upon them*.”

Rights of communities

BOOK II. CHAP. V.

There are various objections that suggest themselves to the theory which subverts the rights of men; and if the theory be true, they will probably appear in the result to be so far from

Objections

really hostile to it, as to be found more fairly deducible from and consistent with its principles, than with any of those with which they have inadvertently been connected.

In the first place it has sometimes been alledged, and seems to result from the reasonings already adduced under the head of justice, that “men have a right to the assistance and co-operation of their fellows in every honest pursuit.” But, when we assert this proposition, we mean something by the word right exceedingly different from what is commonly understood by the term. We do not understand something discretionary, which, if not voluntarily fulfilled, cannot be considered as a matter of claim.

The rights of mutual aid.

Explanation

On the contrary every thing adduced upon that occasion was calculated to shew that it was a matter of strict claim; and perhaps something would be gained with respect to perspicuity, if we rather chose to distinguish it by that appellation, than by a name so much abused, and so ambiguous in its application, as the term right.

BOOK II. CHAP. V.

The true origin of this latter term is relative to the present state of political government, in which many of those actions which moral duty most strictly enjoins us are in no degree brought within the sphere of legislative sanction. Men uninfluenced by comprehensive principles of justice, commit every species of intemperance, are selfish, hard-hearted, licentious and cruel, and maintain their right to all these caprices, because the laws of their country are silent with regard to them. Philosophers and political enquirers have too frequently adopted the same principles with a certain degree of accommodation; though in fact men have no more right to these erroneous propensities in their most qualified sense, than they had to them originally in all their extravagance. It is true, that, under the forms of society now existing in the world, intemperance and the caprices of personal intercourse too frequently escape without animadversion. But in a more perfect form, though they may not fall under the cognisance of law, the offender will probably be so unequivocally reminded by the sincerity of his neighbours of the error he has committed, as to be in no danger of running away with the opinion that he had a right to commit it.

Origin of the term, right

BOOK II. CHAP. V.

A second and more important objection to the doctrine I am maintaining is derived from the rights as they are called of private judgment, and the liberty of the press. But it may easily be shewn, that these, no more than the articles already mentioned, are rights of discretion. If they were, they would prove, that a man was strictly justifiable in publishing what he believed to be pernicious or false, and that it was a matter of perfect moral indifference whether he conformed to the religious rites of Confucius, of Mahomet, or of Christ. The political freedom of

2. Rights of private judgment and of the press.

conscience and of the press, so far from being as it is commonly supposed an extension, is a new case of the limitation of rights and discretion. Conscience and the press ought to be unrestrained, not because men have a right to deviate from the exact line that duty prescribes, but because society, the aggregate of individuals, has no right to assume the prerogative of an infallible

Explanation

judge, and to undertake authoritatively to prescribe to its members in matters of pure speculation.

One obvious reason against this assumption on the part of the society is the impossibility by any compulsory method of bringing men to uniformity of opinion. The judgment we form upon topics of general truth, is or is imagined to be founded upon evidence: and, however it may be soothed by gentle applications to the betraying its impartiality, it is apt to repel with no little pertinacity whatever comes under the form of compulsion. Persecution cannot persuade the understanding, even when it subdues our resolution. It may make us hypocrites; but cannot make us converts. The government therefore, which is anxious above all things to imbue its subjects with integrity and virtue, will be the farthest in the world from discouraging them in the explicit avowal of their sentiments.

Reasons of this limitation upon the functions of the community.

1. The inutility of attempting restraint.

BOOK II. CHAP. V.

But there is another reason of a higher order. Man is not, as has been already shewn, a perfect being, but perfectible. No government, that has yet existed, or is likely presently to exist upon the face of the earth, is faultless. No government ought therefore pertinaciously to resist the change of its own institutions; and still less ought it to set up a standard upon the various topics of human speculation, to restrain the excursions of an inventive mind. It is only by giving a free scope to these excursions, that science, philosophy and morals have arrived at their present degree of perfection, or are capable of going on to that still greater perfection, in comparison of which all that has been already done will perhaps appear childish. But a proceeding, absolutely necessary for the purpose of exciting the mind to these salutary excursions, and still more necessary in order to give them their proper operation, consists in the unrestrained communication of men's thoughts and discoveries to each other. If every man have to begin again at the point from which his neighbour set out, the labour will be endless, and the progress in

2. Its pernicious tendency.

an unvarying circle. There is nothing that more eminently contributes to intellectual energy, than for every man to be habituated to follow without alarm the train of his speculations, and to utter without fear the conclusions that have suggested themselves

BOOK II. CHAP. V.

to him.—But does all this imply that men have a right to act any thing but virtue, and to utter any thing but truth? Certainly not. It implies indeed that there are points with which society has no right to interfere, not that discretion and caprice are more free, or duty less strict upon these points, than upon any others with which human action is conversant.

Conclusion.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. VI.

OF THE EXERCISE OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT

foundation of virtue.—human actions regulated: 1. by the nature of things.—2. by positive institution.—tendency of the latter: 1. to excite virtue.—its equivocal character in this respect.—2. to inform the judgment; its inaptitude for that purpose.—province of conscience considered. tendency of an interference with that province.—recapitulation.—arguments in favour of positive institution: 1. the necessity of repelling private injustice.—objections: the uncertainty of evidence.—the diversity of motives.—the unsuitableness of the means of correction—either to impress new sentiments—or to strengthen old ones.—punishment for the sake of example considered.—urgency of the case.—2. rebellion.—3. war.—objections.—reply.

TO a rational being there can be but one rule of conduct, justice, and one mode of ascertaining that rule, the exercise of his understanding. If in any instance I be made the mechanical instrument of absolute violence, in that instance I fall under no description of moral conduct either good or bad. But, if, not being operated upon by absolute compulsion, I be wholly prompted by something that is frequently called by that name, and act from the hope of reward or the fear of punishment, my conduct is positively wrong.

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.
Foundation of virtue

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

Here however a distinction is to be made. Justice, as it was defined in a preceding chapter, is coincident with utility. I am myself a part of the great whole, and my happiness is a part of that complex view of things by which justice is regulated. The hope of reward therefore and the fear of punishment, confined within certain strict limits, are motives that ought to have influence with my mind.

There are two descriptions of tendency that may belong to any action, the tendency which it possesses by the necessary and universal laws of existence, and the tendency which results from the positive interference of some intelligent being. The nature of happiness and misery, pleasure and pain, is independent of all positive institution: that is, it is immutably true that whatever tends to procure a balance of the former is to be desired, and whatever tends to procure a balance of the latter is to be rejected. In like manner the promulgation of virtue, truth and political justice must always be right. There is perhaps no action of a rational being that has not some tendency to promote these objects, and consequently that has not a moral character founded in the abstract nature of things.

Human actions are regulated, 1. by the nature of things:

The tendency of positive institution is of two sorts, to furnish me with an additional motive to the practice of virtue or right, and to inform my understanding as to what actions are right and what actions are wrong. Much cannot be said in commendation of either of these tendencies.

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.
2. By positive institution.

Tendency of the latter.

1. To excite virtue.

Its equivocal character in this respect.

First, positive institution may furnish me with an additional motive to the practice of virtue. I have an opportunity of contributing very essentially to the advantage of twenty individuals; they will be benefited, and no other persons will sustain a material injury. I ought to embrace this opportunity.

Here let us suppose positive institution to interfere, and to annex some great personal reward to myself to the performance of my duty. This immediately changes the nature of the action. Before I preferred it for its intrinsic excellence. Now, so far as the positive institution operates, I prefer it, because some person has arbitrarily annexed to it a great weight of self-interest. But virtue, considered as the quality of an intelligent being, depends upon the disposition with which the action is accompanied. Under a positive institution then this very action, which is intrinsically virtuous, may, so far as relates to the agent, become vicious. The vicious man would before have neglected the advantage of these twenty individuals, because he would not bring a certain inconvenience or trouble upon himself. The same man with the same disposition will now promote their advantage, because his own welfare is concerned in it. Twenty, other things equal, is twenty times better than one. He that is not governed

by the moral arithmetic of the case, or who acts from a disposition directly at war with that arithmetic, is unjust. In other words, morality requires that we should be attentive only to the tendency which belongs to any action by the necessary and universal laws of existence. This is what is meant by the principle, "that we should do good, regardless of the consequences;" and by that other, "that we may not do evil, from the prospect of good to result from it." The case would have been rendered still more glaring, if, instead of the welfare of twenty, we had supposed the welfare of millions to have been concerned. In reality, whether the disparity be great or small, the inference ought to be the same.

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

Secondly, positive institution may inform my understanding as to what actions are right and what actions are wrong. Here it is proper for us to reflect upon the terms understanding and information. Understanding, particularly as it is concerned with moral subjects, is the percipient of truth. This is its proper sphere. Information, so far as it is genuine, is a portion detached from the great body of truth. You inform me, "that Euclid asserts the three angles of a plane triangle to be equal to two right angles." Still I am unacquainted with the truth of this proposition. "But Euclid has demonstrated it. His demonstration has existed for two thousand years, and during that term has proved satisfactory to every man by whom it has been understood."

2. To inform the judgment. Its inaptitude for that purpose.

I am nevertheless uninformed. The knowledge of truth lies in the perceived agreement or disagreement of the terms of a proposition. So long as I am unacquainted with the middle term by means of which

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

they may be compared, so long as they are incommensurate to my understanding, you may have furnished me with a principle from which I may reason truly to farther consequences, but as to the principle itself I may strictly be said to know nothing about it.

Every proposition has an intrinsic evidence of its own. Every consequence has premises from which it flows; and upon them, and not upon any thing else, its validity depends. If you could work a miracle to prove, “that the three angles of a triangle were equal to two right angles,” I should still know, that the proposition was either true or false previously to the exhibition of that miracle; and that there was no necessary connection between any one of its terms and the miracle exhibited. The miracle would take off my attention from the true question to a question altogether different, that of authority. By the authority adduced I might be prevailed on to yield an irregular assent to the proposition; but I could not properly be said to perceive its truth.

But this is not all. If it were, it might perhaps be regarded as a refinement foreign to the concerns of human life. Positive institutions do not content themselves with requiring my assent to certain propositions, in consideration of the respectable testimony

by which they are enforced. This would amount to no more, than advice flowing from a respectable quarter, which after all I might reject, if it did not accord with the mature judgment of my own understanding. But in the very nature of these institutions there is included a sanction, a motive either of punishment or reward to induce me to obedience.

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

It is commonly said, “that positive institutions ought to leave me perfectly free in matters of conscience, but may properly interfere with my conduct in civil concerns.” But this distinction seems to have been very lightly taken up. What sort of moralist must he be, who makes no conscience of what passes in his intercourse with other men? Such a distinction proceeds upon the supposition, “that it is of great consequence whether I bow to the east or the west; whether I call the object of my worship Jehovah or Alla; whether I pay a priest in a surplice or a black coat. These are points in which an honest man ought to be rigid and inflexible. But as to those other, whether he shall be a tyrant, a slave or a free citizen; whether he shall bind himself with multiplied oaths impossible to be performed, or be a rigid observer of truth; whether he shall swear allegiance to a king *de jure* or a king *de facto*, to the best or the worst of all possible governments; respecting these points he may safely commit his conscience to the keeping of the civil magistrate.” In reality there are perhaps no concerns of a rational being, over which morality does not extend its province, and respecting which he is not bound to a conscientious proceeding.

Province of conscience considered

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

I am satisfied at present, that a certain conduct, suppose it be a rigid attention to the confidence of private conversation, is incumbent upon me. You tell me, “there are certain cases of such peculiar emergency as to supersede this rule.” Perhaps I think

Tendency of an interference with that province

there are not. If I admit your proposition, a wide field of enquiry is opened, respecting what cases do or do not deserve to be considered as exceptions. It is little likely that we should agree respecting all these cases. How then does the law treat me, for my conscientious discharge of what I conceive to be my duty? Because I will not turn informer (which, it may be, I think an infamous character) against my most valued friend, the law accuses me of misprision of treason, felony or murder, and perhaps hangs me. I believe a certain individual to be a confirmed villain, and a most dangerous member of society, and feel it to be my duty to warn others, perhaps the public, against the effect of his vices. Because I publish what I know to be true, the law convicts me of libel, *scandalum magnatum*, and crimes of I know not what complicated denomination.

If the evil stopped here, it would be well. If I only suffered a certain calamity, suppose death, I could endure it. Death has hitherto been the common lot of men, and I expect at some time or other to submit to it. Human society must sooner or later be deprived of its individual members, whether they be valuable, or whether they be inconsiderable. But the punishment acts not only retrospectively upon me, but prospectively upon my contemporaries and countrymen. My neighbour entertains the same opinion respecting the conduct he ought to hold as I did. But the executioner of public justice interposes with a powerful argument, to convince him that he has mistaken the path of abstract rectitude.

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

What sort of converts will be produced by this unfeeling logic? “I have deeply reflected,” suppose, “upon the nature of virtue, and am convinced that a certain proceeding is incumbent on me. But the hangman, supported by an act of parliament, assures me I am mistaken.” If I yield my opinion to his *dictum*, my action becomes modified, and my character too. An influence like this is inconsistent with all generous magnanimity of spirit, all ardent impartiality in the discovery of truth, and all inflexible perseverance in its assertion. Countries, exposed to the perpetual interference of decrees instead of arguments, exhibit within their boundaries the mere phantoms of men. We can never judge from an observation of their inhabitants what men would be, if they knew of no appeal from the tribunal of conscience, and if, whatever they thought, they dared to speak, and dared to act.

At present there will perhaps occur to the majority of readers but few instances of laws, which may be supposed to interfere with the conscientious discharge of duty. A considerable number will occur in the course of the present enquiry. More would readily offer themselves to a patient research. Men are so successfully reduced to a common standard by the operation of positive law, that in most countries they are capable of little more than like parrots repeating each other. This uniformity is capable of being produced in two ways, by energy of mind and indefatigableness of enquiry, enabling a considerable number to penetrate with equal success into the recesses of truth; and by pusillanimity of temper and a frigid indifference to right and wrong, produced by the penalties which are suspended over such as shall disinterestedly enquire, and communicate and act upon the result of their enquiries. It is easy to perceive which of these is the cause of the uniformity that prevails in the present instance.

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

If there be any truth more unquestionable than the rest, it is, that every man is bound to the exertion of his faculties in the discovery of right, and to the carrying into effect all the right with which he is acquainted. It may be granted that an infallible standard, if it could be discovered, would be considerably beneficial. But this infallible standard itself would be of little use in human affairs, unless it had the property of reasoning as well as deciding, of enlightening the mind as well as constraining the body. If a man be in some cases obliged to prefer his own judgment, he is in all cases obliged to consult that judgment, before he can determine whether the matter in question be of the sort provided for or no. So that from this reasoning it ultimately appears, that no man is obliged to conform to any rule of conduct, farther than the rule is consistent with justice.

Recapitulation

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

Such are the genuine principles of human society. Such would be the unconstrained concord of its members, in a state where every individual within the society, and every neighbour without, was capable of listening with sobriety to the dictates of reason. We shall not fail to be impressed with considerable regret, if, when we descend to the present mixed characters of mankind, we find ourselves obliged in any degree to depart from so simple and grand a principle. The universal exercise of private judgment is a doctrine so unspeakably beautiful, that the true politician will certainly resolve to interfere with it as sparingly and in as few instances as possible. Let us consider what are the emergencies that may be thought to demand an exception. They can only be briefly stated in this place, each of them requiring to be minutely examined in the subsequent stages of the enquiry.

Arguments in favour of positive institution:

In the first place then it seems necessary for some powerful arbitrator to interfere, where the proceedings of the individual threaten the most injurious consequences to his neighbours, and where the instant nature of the case will not accord with the uncertain progress of argument and conviction addressed to the mind of the offender. A man, suppose, has committed murder, or, to make the case more aggravated, several murders; and, having thus far over-stepped all those boundaries of innocence and guilt which restrain the generality of men, it is to be presumed from analogy that he may be led to the commission of other murders. At first it may appear to be no great infringement upon the exercise of private judgment, to put it under some degree of restraint, when it leads to the commission of atrocious crimes. There are however certain difficulties in the case which are worthy to be considered.

1. The necessity of repelling private injustice

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

First, as soon as we admit the propriety of a rule such as that above stated, our next concern will be with the evidence, which shall lead to the acquittal or conviction of the person accused. Now it is well known, that no principles of evidence have yet been laid down that are infallible. Human affairs universally proceed upon presumption and probability. An eye-witness must identify the person of the offender, and in this he may be mistaken. We must necessarily be contented with presumptive proofs of his intention; and often are or

Objections:

the uncertainty of evidence:

imagine ourselves to be obliged to admit presumptive evidence of the fact itself. The consequence is inevitable. And surely it is no trivial evil, to subject an innocent man eventually, to the public award and the established punishment annexed to the most atrocious crimes.

Secondly, the same external action will admit of every possible shade of virtue or vice. One man shall commit murder, to remove a troublesome observer of his depraved dispositions, who will otherwise counteract and expose him to the world. A second, because he cannot bear the ingenuous sincerity with which he is told of his vices. A third, from his intolerable envy of superior merit. A fourth, because he knows his adversary meditates an act pregnant with extensive mischief, and he perceives no other mode by which its perpetration can be prevented. A fifth, in the actual defence of his father's life or his daughter's chastity. Each of these men, except perhaps the last, may act either from momentary impulse, or from any of the infinite shades and degrees of deliberation. Would you award one individual punishment to all these varieties of action? Can you pretend in each instance to ascertain the exact quantity of wrong, equivalent to each? Strictly speaking no two men were ever guilty of the same crime; but here comes in positive law with its Procrustes's bed, and levels all characters, and tramples upon all distinctions.

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.
the diversity of
motives:

Thirdly, punishment is not the appropriate mode of correcting the errors of mankind. It will probably be admitted, that the only true end of punishment is correction. That question will be discussed in another part of the present enquiry. "I have done something, which though wrong in itself, I believe to be right; or I have done something which I usually admit to be wrong; but my conviction upon the subject is not so clear and forcible, as to prevent my yielding to a powerful temptation."

the unsuitableness of
the means of
correction:

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

There can be no doubt, that the proper way of conveying to my understanding a truth of which I am ignorant, or of impressing upon me a firmer persuasion of a truth with which I am acquainted, is by an appeal to my reason. Even an angry expostulation with me upon my conduct will but excite similar passions in me, and cloud instead of illuminate my understanding. There is certainly a way of expressing truth, with such benevolence as to command attention, and such evidence as to inforce conviction in all cases whatever.

Punishment inevitably excites in the sufferer, and ought to excite, a sense of injustice. Let its purpose be to convince me of the truth of a proposition, which I at present believe to be false. It is not abstractedly considered of the nature of an argument, and therefore it cannot begin with producing conviction. Punishment is a specious name, but is in reality nothing more than force put upon one being by another who happens to be stronger. Now strength apparently does not constitute justice, nor ought "might," according to a trite proverb, to "overcome right." The case of punishment, which we are now considering, is the case of you and I differing in opinion, and your telling me that you must be right, since you have a more brawny arm, or have applied your mind more to the acquiring skill in your weapons than I have.

either to impress new
sentiments:

But let us suppose, “that I am convinced of my error, but that my conviction is superficial and fluctuating, and the object you propose is to render it durable and profound.” Ought it to be thus durable and profound? There are no doubt arguments and reasons calculated to render it so. Is it in reality problematical, and do you wish by the weight of your blows to make up for the deficiency of your logic? This can never be defended. An appeal to force must appear to both parties, in proportion to the soundness of their understanding, to be a confession of imbecility. He that has recourse to it, would have no occasion for this expedient, if he were sufficiently acquainted with the powers of that truth it is his office to communicate. If there be any man, who, in suffering punishment, is not conscious of injustice, he must have had his mind previously debased by slavery, and his sense of moral right and wrong blunted by a series of oppression.

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.
or To strengthen old ones

The case is not altered for the better, if I suffer punishment, not for my own correction, but for an example to others. Upon this supposition a new difficulty is introduced, respecting the propriety of one man's being subjected to pain, for the sake of improving the character and eradicating the vices of another. The suffering is here also involuntary. Now, though will cannot alter the nature of justice, it must be admitted that the voluntary sufferer has at least one advantage over the involuntary, in the conscious liberality of his purpose. He that suffers, not for his own correction, but for the advantage of others, stands, so far as relates to that suffering, in the situation of an innocent person. If the suffering had relation to him personally as a vicious or imperfect character, it must have relation to him in respect either to the past or the future. It cannot have relation to him as to the past, for that is concluded and beyond the reach of alteration or remedy. By the supposition it has not relation to him but to others as to the future.

Punishment for the sake of example considered

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

It ought to be observed in this place, that by innocence I do not understand virtue. Innocence is a sort of neutral character, and stands in the mid way between good and harm. Undoubtedly it were better, that a person useless to society should be destroyed than a man of eminent worth, and a person likely to prove injurious than either. I say likely to prove injurious; for the fault already committed, being irrevocable, ought not to enter into the account, and we have nothing to do but with the probability of its repetition. It is in this sense that the sufferer stands upon a level with many of those persons, who are usually denominated innocent.

It must also be allowed, that there are cases in which it is proper that innocent men should suffer for the public good. But this is a question of a very delicate nature, and the severe moralist will be very reluctant to condemn that man to die for the benefit of others, who is desirous to live.

As to every other circumstance in the case of him who is punished for an example to others, it remains precisely the same as when we supposed him to be punished for his own reformation. It is still an argument of the most exceptionable nature employed to correct the opinions of mankind. It is still a menace of violence made use of to

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

persuade them of the truth or falshood of a proposition. It has little chance of making them wise, and can scarcely fail of making them timid, dissembling and corrupt.

Notwithstanding all these objections, it would be difficult to find a country, respecting which we could say, that the inhabitants might with safety be dismissed from the operation of punishment. So mixed is human character, so wild are its excursions, so calamitous and detestable are the errors into which it occasionally falls, that something more than argument seems necessary for their suppression. Human beings are such tyros in the art of reasoning, that the wisest of us often prove impotent in our attempts, where an instant effect was most powerfully wanted. While I stand still to reason with the thief, the assassin or the oppressor, they hasten to new scenes of devastation, and with unsparing violence confound all the principles of human society. I should obtain little success by the abolition of punishment, unless I could at the same time abolish those causes that generate temptation and make punishment necessary. Meanwhile the arguments already adduced may be sufficient to shew that punishment is always an evil, and to persuade us never to recur to it but from the most evident necessity.

Urgency of the case

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

The remaining cases in which it may seem requisite to have recourse to the general will of the society, and to supersede the private judgment of individuals, are, when we are called upon to counteract the hostilities of an internal enemy, or to repel the attacks of a foreign invader. Here as in the former instance the evils that arise from an usurpation upon private judgment are many and various. It is wrong that I should contribute in any mode to a proceeding, a war for example, that I believe to be unjust. Ought I to draw my sword, when the adversary appears to me to be employed in repelling a wanton aggression? The case seems not to be at all different, if I contribute my property, the produce it may be of my personal labour; though custom has reconciled us to the one rather than the other.

2. Rebellion.

3. War.

Objections

The consequences are a degradation of character and a relaxation of principle, in the person who is thus made the instrument of a transaction, which his judgment disapproves. In this case, as has been already stated generally, the human mind is compressed and unnerved, till it affords us scarcely the semblance of what it might otherwise have been. And, in addition to the general considerations in similar cases, it may be observed, that the frequent and obstinate wars which at present desolate the human race would be nearly extirpated, if they were supported only by the voluntary contributions of those by whom their principle was approved.

BOOK II. CHAP. VI.

The objection, which has hitherto been permitted practically to supersede these reasonings, is the difficulty of conducting an affair, in the success of which millions may be interested, upon so precarious a support as that of private judgment. The men, with whom we are usually concerned in human society, are of so mixed a character, and a self-love of the narrowest kind is so deeply rooted in many of them, that it seems nearly unavoidable upon the scheme of voluntary contribution, that the most generous would pay a very

Reply

ample proportion, while the mean and avaricious, though they contributed nothing, would come in for their full share of the benefit. He that would reconcile a perfect freedom in this respect with the interest of the whole, ought to propose at the same time the means of extirpating selfishness and vice. How far such a proposal is feasible will come hereafter to be considered.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

An
ENQUIRY
Concerning
POLITICAL JUSTICE

Book Iii.
PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT

CHAP. I.

SYSTEMS OF POLITICAL WRITERS

the question stated.—first hypothesis: government founded in superior strength.—second hypothesis: government *jure divino*.—third hypothesis: the social contract.—the first hypothesis examined—second—criterion of divine right: 1. patriarchal descent—2. justice.

IT has appeared in the course of our reasonings upon the nature of society, that there are occasions in which it may be necessary, to supersede private judgment for the sake of public good, and to control the acts of the individual by an act to be performed in the name of the whole. It is therefore an interesting enquiry to ascertain in what manner such acts are to be originated, or in other words to ascertain the foundation of political government.

BOOK III. CHAP. I.
The question stated
BOOK III. CHAP. I.

There are three hypotheses that have been principally maintained upon this subject. First, the system of force, according to which it is affirmed, “that, inasmuch as it is necessary that the great mass of mankind should be held under the subjection of compulsory restraint, there can be no other criterion of that restraint, than the power of the individuals who lay claim to its exercise, the foundation of which power exists in the unequal degrees, in which corporal strength and intellectual sagacity are distributed among mankind.”

First hypothesis:
government founded
in superior strength

There is a second class of reasoners, who deduce the origin of all government from divine right, and affirm, “that, as men derived their existence from an infinite creator at first, so are they still subject to his providential care, and of consequence owe allegiance to their civil governors, as to a power which he has thought fit to set over them.”

Second hypothesis:
government *jure
divino*

The third system is that which has been most usually maintained by the friends of equality and justice; the system according to

Third hypothesis: the
social contract

which the individuals of any society are supposed to have entered into a contract with their governors or with each other, and which founds the rights of government in the consent of the governed.

BOOK III. CHAP. I.

The two first of these hypotheses may easily be dismissed. That of force appears to proceed upon the total negation of abstract and immutable justice, affirming every government to be right, that is possessed of power sufficient to enforce its decrees.

The first hypothesis examined.

It puts a violent termination upon all political science; and seems intended to persuade men, to sit down quietly under their present disadvantages, whatever they may be, and not exert themselves to discover a remedy for the evils they suffer. The second hypothesis is of an equivocal nature. It either coincides with the first, and affirms all existing power to be alike of divine

The second.

derivation; or it must remain totally useless till a criterion can be found, to distinguish those governments which are approved by God, from those which cannot lay claim to that sanction. The

criterion of patriarchal descent will be of no avail, till the true claimant and rightful heir can be discovered. If we make utility and justice the test of God's approbation, this hypothesis will be liable to little objection; but then on the other hand little will be gained by it, since those who have not introduced divine right into the argument, will yet readily grant, that a government which can be shewn to be agreeable to utility and justice, is a rightful government.

Criterion of divine right. 1. Patriarchal descent. 2. Justice.

The third hypothesis demands a more careful examination. If any error have insinuated itself into the support of truth, it becomes of particular consequence to detect it. Nothing can be of more importance, than to separate prejudice and mistake on the one hand, from reason and demonstration on the other. Wherever they have been confounded, the cause of truth must necessarily be a sufferer. That cause, so far from being injured by the dissolution of the unnatural alliance, may be expected to derive from that dissolution an eminent degree of prosperity and lustre.

BOOK III. CHAP. I.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. II.

OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

queries proposed.—who are the contracting parties?—what is the form of engagement?—over how long a period does the contract extend?—to how great a variety of propositions?—can it extend to lawshereaftertobemadex2014addr014;addresses of adhesion considered.—power of a majority.

UPON the first statement of the system of a social contract various difficulties present themselves. Who are the parties to this contract? For whom did they consent, for themselves only or for others? For how long a time is this contract to be considered as binding? If the consent of every individual be necessary, in what manner is that consent to be given? Is it to be tacit, or declared in express terms?

BOOK III. CHAP. II.
Queries proposed

Little will be gained for the cause of equality and justice, if our ancestors, at the first institution of government, had a right indeed of choosing the system of regulations under which they thought proper to live, but at the same time could barter away the understandings and independence of all that came after them to the latest posterity. But, if the contract must be renewed in each successive generation, what periods must be fixed on for that purpose? And if I be obliged to submit to the established government till my turn comes to assent to it, upon what principle is that obligation founded? Surely not upon the contract into which my father entered before I was born?

Who are the
contracting parties?

BOOK III. CHAP. II.

Secondly, what is the nature of the consent, in consequence of which I am to be reckoned the subject of any particular government? It is usually said, “that acquiescence is sufficient; and that this acquiescence is to be inferred from my living quietly under the protection of the laws.” But if this be true, an end is as effectually put to all political science, all discrimination of better and worse, as by any system invented by the most slavish sycophant that ever existed. Upon this hypothesis every government that is quietly submitted to is a lawful government, whether it be the usurpation of Cromwel or the tyranny of Caligula. Acquiescence is frequently nothing more than a choice on the part of the individual of what he deems the least evil. In many cases it is not so much as this, since the peasant and the artisan, who form the bulk of a nation, however dissatisfied with the government of their country, seldom have it in their power to transport themselves to another. It is also to be observed upon the system of acquiescence, that it is in little agreement with the established opinions and practices of mankind. Thus what has been called the law of nations, lays least stress upon the allegiance of a foreigner settling among us, though his acquiescence is certainly

What is the form of
engagement?

BOOK III. CHAP. II.

most complete; while natives removing into an uninhabited region are claimed by the mother country, and removing into a neighbouring territory are punished by municipal law, if they take arms against the country in which they were born. Now surely acquiescence can scarcely be construed into consent, while the individuals concerned are wholly unapprised of the authority intended to be rested upon it.*

Mr. Locke, the great champion of the doctrine of an original contract, has been aware of this difficulty, and therefore observes, that “a tacit consent indeed obliges a man to obey the laws of any government, as long as he has any possessions, or enjoyment of any part of the dominions of that government; but nothing can make a man a member of the commonwealth, but his actually entering into it by positive engagement, and express promise and compact.dagger” A singular distinction; implying upon the face of it, that an acquiescence, such as has just been described, is sufficient to render a man amenable to the penal regulations of society; but that his own consent is necessary to entitle him to its privileges.

A third objection to the social contract will suggest itself, as soon as we attempt to ascertain the extent of the obligation, even supposing it to have been entered into in the most solemn manner by every member of the community. Allowing that I am called upon, at the period of my coming of age for example, to declare my assent or dissent to any system of opinions or any code of practical institutes; for how long a period does this declaration bind me? Am I precluded from better information for the whole course of my life? And, if not for my whole life, why for a year, a week or even an hour? If my deliberate judgment or my real sentiment be of no avail in the case, in what sense can it be affirmed that all lawful government is founded in my consent?

Over how long a period does the contract extend?

BOOK III. CHAP. II.

But the question of time is not the only difficulty. If you demand my assent to any proposition, it is necessary that the proposition should be stated simply and clearly. So numerous are the varieties of human understanding, in all cases where its independence and integrity are sufficiently preserved, that there is little chance of any two men coming to a precise agreement about ten successive propositions that are in their own nature open to debate. What then can be more absurd than to present to me the laws of England in fifty volumes folio, and call upon me to give an honest and uninfluenced vote upon their whole contents at once?

To how great a variety of propositions?

But the social contract, considered as the foundation of civil government, requires more of me than this. I am not only obliged to consent to all the laws that are actually upon record, but to all the laws that shall hereafter be made. It was under this view of the subject, that Rousseau, in tracing the consequences of the social contract, was led to assert, that “the great body of the people, in whom the sovereign authority resides, can neither delegate nor resign it. The essence of that authority,” he adds, “is the general will; and will cannot be represented. It must either be the same or another; there is no alternative. The deputies of the people cannot be

Can it extend to laws hereafter to be made?

BOOK III. CHAP. II.

its representatives; they are merely its attorneys. The laws, that the community does not ratify in person, are no laws, are nullities.”*

The difficulty here stated has been endeavoured to be provided against by some late advocates for liberty, in the way of addresses of adhesion; addresses, originating in the various districts and departments of a nation, and without which no regulation of constitutional importance is to be deemed valid. But this is a very inadequate and superficial remedy. The addressers of course have seldom any other remedy than that above described, of in

Addresses of adhesion considered

discriminate admission or rejection. There is an infinite difference between the first deliberation, and the subsequent exercise of a negative. The former is a real power, the latter is seldom more than the shadow of a power. Not to add, that addresses are a most precarious and equivocal mode of collecting the sense of a nation. They are usually voted in a tumultuous and summary manner; they are carried along by the tide of party; and the signatures annexed to them are obtained by indirect and accidental methods, while multitudes of bystanders, unless upon some extraordinary occasion, remain ignorant of or indifferent to the transaction.

BOOK III. CHAP. II.

Lastly, if government be founded in the consent of the people, it can have no power over any individual by whom that consent is refused. If a tacit consent be not sufficient, still less can I be deemed to have consented to a measure upon which I put an express negative. This immediately follows from the observations of Rousseau. If the people, or the individuals of whom the people is constituted, cannot delegate their authority to a representative; neither can any individual delegate his authority to a majority, in an assembly of which he is himself a member. The rules by which my actions shall be directed are matters of a consideration entirely personal; and no man can transfer to another the keeping of his conscience and the judging of his duties. But this brings us back to the point from which we set

Power of a majority

out. No consent of ours can divest us of our moral capacity. This is a species of property which we can neither barter nor resign; and of consequence it is impossible for any government to derive its authority from an original contract.

BOOK III. CHAP. II.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. III.

OF PROMISES

the validity of promises examined.—shewn to be inconsistent with justice.—to be foreign to the general good.—of the expectation excited.—the fulfilling expectation does not imply the validity of a promise.—conclusion.

THE whole principle of an original contract proceeds upon the obligation under which we are placed to observe our promises. The reasoning upon which it is founded is, “that we have promised obedience to government, and therefore are bound to obey.” It may consequently be proper to enquire into the nature of this obligation to observe our promises.

BOOK III. CHAP. III.
The validity of
promises examined

We have already established justice as the sum of moral and political duty. Is justice then in its own nature precarious or immutable? Surely immutable. As long as men are men, the conduct I am bound to observe respecting them must remain the same. A good man must always be the proper object of my support and cooperation; vice of my censure; and the vicious man of instruction and reform.

Shewn to be
inconsistent with
justice:

What is it then to which the obligation of a promise applies? What I have promised is either right, or wrong, or indifferent. There are few articles of human conduct that fall under the latter

BOOK III. CHAP. III.

class; and the greater shall be our improvements in moral science the fewer still will they appear. Omitting these, let us then consider only the two preceding classes. “I have promised to do something just and right.” This certainly I ought to perform. Why? Not because I promised, but because justice prescribes it. “I have promised to bestow a sum of money upon some good and respectable purpose. In the interval between the promise and my fulfilling it, a greater and nobler purpose offers itself, and calls with an imperious voice for my cooperation.” Which ought I to prefer? That which best deserves my preference. A promise can make no alteration in the case. I ought to be guided by the intrinsic merit of the objects, and not by any external and foreign consideration. No engagements of mine can change their intrinsic claims.

All this must be exceedingly plain to the reader who has followed me in my early reasonings upon the nature of justice. If every shilling of our property, every hour of our time and every faculty of our mind, have already received their destination from the principles of immutable justice, promises have no department left upon which for them to decide. Justice it appears therefore ought to be done, whether we have promised it or not. If we discover any thing to be unjust, we ought to abstain from it, with what

BOOK III. CHAP. III.

ever solemnity we have engaged for its perpetration. We were erroneous and vicious when the promise was made; but this affords no sufficient reason for its performance.

But it will be said, “if promises be not made, or when made be not fulfilled, how can the affairs of the world be carried on?” By rational and intelligent beings acting as if they were rational and intelligent. A promise would perhaps be sufficiently innocent, if it were understood merely as declaratory of intention, and not as precluding farther information. Even in this restrained sense however it is far from being generally necessary. Why should it be supposed that the affairs of the world would not go on sufficiently well, though my neighbour could no farther depend upon my assistance than it appeared rational to grant it? This would be a sufficient dependence if I were honest, nor would he if he were honest desire any thing more. If I were dishonest, if I could not be bound by the reason and justice of the case, it would afford him a slender additional dependence to call in the aid of a principle founded in prejudice and mistake: not to say, that, let it afford ever so great advantage in any particular case, the evil of the immoral precedent would outweigh the individual advantage.

to be foreign to
general good

It may be farther objected, “that this principle might be sufficiently suited to a better and more perfect state of society, but that at present there are dishonest members of the community, who will not perform their duty, if they be not bound to it by some grosser motive, than the mere moral consideration.” Be it so. This is a question altogether different from that we have been examining. We are not now enquiring whether the community ought to animadvert upon the errors of its members. This animadversion the upright man is not backward to encounter, and willingly risks the penalty, which the society (for the society is more competent to ascertain the just amount of the penalty than the preceding caprice of the parties) has awarded in cases apparently similar, if he conceive that his duty requires from him that risk.

BOOK III. CHAP. III.

But to return to the case of promises. I shall be told, that, “in choosing between two purposes about which to employ my money, my time or my talents, my promise may make an essential difference, and therefore having once been given ought to be fulfilled. The party to whom it was made has had expectations excited in him, which I ought not to disappoint; the party to whom I am under no engagement has no such disappointment to encounter.” What is this tenderness to which I am bound, this expectation I must not dare to disappoint? An expectation that I should do wrong, that I should prefer a less good to a greater, that I should commit absolute evil; for such must be the result when the balance has been struck. “But his expectation has altered the nature of his situation, has engaged him in undertakings from which he would otherwise have abstained.” Be it so. He and all other men will be taught to depend more upon their own exertions, and less upon the assistance of others, which caprice may refuse, or justice oblige me to withhold. He and all others will be taught to acquire such merit, and to engage in such pursuits, as shall oblige every honest man to come to their succour, if they should stand in need of assistance. The resolute execution of justice, without listening to that false pity, which, to do imaginary kindness to one,

Of the expectation
excited

BOOK III. CHAP. III.

would lead us to injure the whole, would in a thousand ways increase the independence, the energies and the virtue of mankind.

Let us however suppose, “that my conduct ought to be influenced by this previous expectation of the individual.” Let us suppose, “that, in selecting an individual for a certain office, my choice ought not to be governed merely by the abstract fitness of the candidates, but that I ought to take into the account the extreme value of the appointment from certain circumstances to one of the candidates, and its comparative inutility to the other.” Let us farther suppose, “that the expectation excited in one of them has led him into studies and pursuits to qualify himself for the office, which will be useless if he do not succeed to it; and that this is one of the considerations which ought to govern my determination.”—All this does not come up to what we have been taught respecting the obligation of a promise.

The fulfilling expectation does not imply the validity of a promise

For, first, it may be observed, that it seems to be of little consequence in this statement, whether the expectation were excited by a direct promise or in some other manner, whether it were excited by a declaration of mine or of a third person, or lastly, whether it arose singly out of the reason of the case and the pure deductions and reflections of the expecter's mind. Upon every one of these suppositions his conduct, and the injury he may sustain from a disappointment, will remain the same. Here then all that has been commonly understood by the obligation of a promise is excluded. The motive to be attended to, flows from no solemn engagement of mine, but from an incidental consequence of my declaration, and which might just as easily have been the consequence of many other circumstances. The consideration by which it becomes me to be influenced is, not a regard for veracity, or a particular desire to preserve my integrity, both of which are in reality wholly unconcerned in the transaction, but an attention to the injury to be sustained by the losing candidate, whatever might be the original occasion of the conduct out of which the injury has proceeded.

BOOK III. CHAP. III.

Let us take an example of a still simpler nature. “I live in Westminster; and I engage to meet the captain of a ship from Blackwal at the Royal Exchange. My engagement is of the nature of information to him, that I shall be at the Exchange at a certain hour. He accordingly lays aside his other business, and comes thither to meet me.” This is a reason why I should

not fail him unless for some very material cause. But it would seem as if the reason why I should not fail him would be equally cogent, if I knew from any other source that he would be there, and that a quantity of convenience equal to the quantity upon the former supposition would accrue from my meeting him. It may be said, “that it is essential to various circumstances of human intercourse, that we should be able to depend on each other for a steady adherence to engagements of this sort.” The statement however would be somewhat more accurate if we said, “that it was essential to various circumstances of human intercourse, that we should be known to bestow a steady attention upon the quantities of convenience or inconvenience, of good or evil, that might arise to others from our conduct.”

BOOK III. CHAP. III.

Conclusion

It is undoubtedly upon this hypothesis a part of our duty to make as few promises or declarations exciting appropriate expectations as possible. He who lightly gives to another the idea that he will govern himself in his future conduct, not by the views that shall be present to his mind when the conduct shall come to be determined on, but by the view he shall be able to take of it at some preceding period, is vicious in so doing. But the obligation he is under respecting his future conduct is, to act justly, and not, because he has committed one error, for that reason to become guilty of a second.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. IV.

OF POLITICAL AUTHORITY

common deliberation the true foundation of government—proved from the equal claims of mankind—from the nature of our faculties—from the object of government—from the effects of common deliberation. —difference between the doctrine here maintained and that of a social contract apparent—from the merely prospective nature of the former—from the nullity of promises—from the fallibility of deliberation.—conclusion.

HAVING rejected the hypotheses that have most generally been adduced to account for the origin of government consistently with the principles of moral justice, let us enquire whether we may not arrive at the same object, by a simple investigation of the obvious reason of the case, without having recourse to any refinement of system or fiction of process.

BOOK III. CHAP. IV.

Government then being introduced for the reasons already assigned, the first and most important principle that can be imagined relative to its form and structure, seems to be this; that, as government is a transaction in the name and for the benefit of the whole, every member of the community ought to have some share in its administration. The arguments in support of this proposition are various.

Common deliberation the true foundation of government:

BOOK III. CHAP. IV.

1. It has already appeared that there is no criterion perspicuously designating any one man or set of men to preside over the rest.

proved from the equal claims of mankind:

2. All men are partakers of the common faculty reason, and may be supposed to have some communication with the common preceptor truth. It would be wrong in an affair of such momentous concern, that any chance for additional wisdom should be rejected; nor can we tell in many cases till after the experiment how eminent any individual may one day be found in the business of guiding and deliberating for his fellows.

from the nature of our faculties:

3. Government is a contrivance instituted for the security of individuals; and it seems both reasonable that each man should have a share in providing for his own security, and probable that partiality and cabal should by this means be most effectually excluded.

from the object of government:

4. Lastly, to give each man a voice in the public concerns comes nearest to that admirable idea of which we should never lose

from the effects of common deliberation

sight, the uncontrolled exercise of private judgment. Each man would thus be inspired with a consciousness of his own importance, and the slavish feelings that shrink up the soul in the presence of an imagined superior would be unknown.

BOOK III. CHAP.
IV.

Admitting then the propriety of each man having a share in directing the affairs of the whole in the first instance, it seems necessary that he should concur, in electing a house of representatives, if he be the member of a large state; or, even in a small one, that he should assist in the appointment of officers and administrators; which implies, first, a delegation of authority to these officers, and, secondly, a tacit consent, or rather an admission of the necessity, that the questions to be debated should abide the decision of a majority.

But to this system of delegation the same objections may be urged, that were cited from Rousseau in the chapter of the Social Contract. It may be alleged that, “if it be the business of every man to exercise his own judgment, he can in no instance surrender this function into the hands of another.”

Delegation vindicated

To this objection it may be answered, first, that the parallel is by no means complete between an individual's exercise of his judgment in a case that is truly his own, and his exercise of his judgment in an article where the necessity and province of government are already admitted. Wherever there is a government, there must be a will superseding that of individuals. It is absurd to expect that every member of a society should agree with every other member in the various measures it may be found necessary to adopt. The same necessity, that requires the introduction of force to suppress injustice on the part of a few, requires that the sentiments of the majority should direct that force, and that the minority should either secede, or patiently wait for the period when the truth on the subject contested shall be generally understood.

BOOK III. CHAP.
IV.

Secondly, delegation is not, as at first sight it might appear to be, the act of one man committing to another a function, which strictly speaking it became him to exercise for himself. Delegation, in every instance in which it can be reconciled with justice, is an act which has for its object the general good. The individuals to whom the delegation is made, are either more likely from talents or leisure to perform the function in the most eligible manner, or at least there is some public interest requiring that it should be performed by one or a few persons, rather than by every individual for himself. This is the case, whether in that first and simplest of all delegations the prerogative of a majority, or in the election of a house of representatives, or in the appointment of public officers. Now all contest as to the person who shall exercise a certain function, and the propriety of resigning it, is frivolous, the moment it is decided how and by whom it can most advantageously be exercised. It is of no consequence that I am the parent of a child, when it has once been ascertained that the child will receive greater benefit by living under the superintendence of a stranger.

BOOK III. CHAP.
IV.

Lastly, it is a mistake to imagine that the propriety of restraining me when my conduct is injurious, rises out of any delegation of mine. The justice of employing force when every other means was insufficient, is even prior to the existence of society. Force ought never to be resorted to but in cases of absolute necessity; and, when such cases occur, it is the duty of every man to defend himself from violation. There is therefore no delegation necessary on the part of the offender; but the community in the censure it exercises over him stands in the place of the injured party.

It may perhaps by some persons be imagined, that the doctrine here delivered of the justice of proceeding in common concerns by a common deliberation, is nearly coincident with that other doctrine which teaches that all lawful government derives its authority from a social contract. Let us consider what is the true difference between them.

Difference between the doctrine here maintained and that of a social contract apparent:

In the first place, the doctrine of common deliberation is of a prospective, and not a retrospective nature. Is the question respecting some future measure to be adopted in behalf of the community? Here the obligation to deliberate in common presents itself, as eminently to be preferred to every other mode of deciding upon the interests of the whole. Is the question whether I shall yield obedience to any measure already promulgated?

from the merely prospective nature of the former:

BOOK III. CHAP. IV.

Here I have nothing to do with the consideration of how the measure originated; unless perhaps in a country where common deliberation has in some sort been admitted as a standing principle, and where the object may be to resist an innovation upon this principle. In the case of ship money under king Charles the first, it was perhaps fair to resist the tax, even supposing it to be abstractedly a good one, upon account of the authority imposing it; though that reason might be insufficient, in a country unused to representative taxation.

Exclusively of this consideration, no measure is to be resisted on account of the irregularity of its derivation. If it be just, it is entitled both to my cheerful submission and my zealous support. So far as it is deficient in justice, I am bound to resist. My situation in this respect is in no degree different from what it was previously to all organised government. Justice was at that time entitled to my assent, and injustice to my disapprobation. They can never cease to have the same claims upon me, till they shall cease to be distinguished by the same unalterable properties. The measure of my resistance will however vary with circumstances, and therefore will demand from us a separate examination.

Secondly, the distinction between the doctrine here advanced and that of a social contract will be better understood, if we recollect what has been said upon the nature and validity of promises. If promise be in all cases a fallacious mode of binding a man to a specific mode of action, then must the argument be in all cases impertinent, that I consented to such a decision, and am therefore bound to regulate myself accordingly. It is impossible to imagine a principle of more injurious tendency, than that which shall teach me to disarm my future wisdom by my past

BOOK III. CHAP. IV. from the nullity of promises:

folly, and to consult for my direction the errors in which my ignorance has involved me, rather than the code of eternal truth. So far as consent has any validity, abstract justice becomes a matter of pure indifference: so far as justice deserves to be made the guide of my life, it is in vain to endeavour to share its authority with compacts and promises.

We have found the parallel to be in one respect incomplete between the exercise of these two functions, private judgment and common deliberation. In another respect the analogy is exceedingly striking, and considerable perspicuity will be given to our ideas of the latter by an illustration borrowed from the former. In the one case as in the other there is an obvious principle of justice in favour of the general exercise. No individual can arrive at any degree of moral or intellectual improvement, unless in the use of an independent judgment. No state can be well or happily administered, unless in the perpetual use of common deliberation respecting the measures it may be requisite to adopt. But, though the general exercise of these faculties be founded in immutable justice, justice will by no means uniformly vindicate the particular application of them. Private judgment and public deliberation are not themselves the standard of moral right and wrong; they are only the means of discovering right and wrong, and of comparing particular propositions with the standard of eternal truth.

from the fallibility of
deliberation

BOOK III. CHAP.
IV.

Too much stress has undoubtedly been laid upon the idea, as of a grand and magnificent spectacle, of a nation deciding for itself upon some great public principle, and of the highest magistracy yielding its claims when the general voice has pronounced. The value of the whole must at last depend upon the quality of their decision. Truth cannot be made more true by the number of its votaries. Nor is the spectacle much less interesting, of a solitary individual bearing his undaunted testimony in favour of justice, though opposed by misguided millions. Within certain limits however the beauty of the exhibition must be acknowledged. That a nation should dare to vindicate its function of common deliberation, is a step gained, and a step that inevitably leads to an improvement of the character of individuals. That men should unite in the assertion of truth, is no unpleasing evidence of their virtue. Lastly, that an individual, however great may be his imaginary elevation, should be obliged to yield his personal pretensions to the sense of the community, at least bears the appearance of a practical confirmation of the great principle, that all private considerations must yield to the general good.

Conclusion

BOOK III. CHAP.
IV.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. V.

OF LEGISLATION

society can declare and interpret, but cannot enact.—its authority only executive.

HAVING thus far investigated the nature of political functions, it seems necessary that some explanation should be given in this place upon the subject of legislation. Who is it that has the authority to make laws? What are the characteristics by which that man or body of men is to be known, in whom the faculty is vested of legislating for the rest?

To these questions the answer is exceedingly simple: Legislation, as it has been usually understood, is not an affair of human competence. Reason is the only legislator, and her decrees are irrevocable and uniform. The functions of society extend, not to the making, but the interpreting of law; it cannot decree, it can only declare that, which the nature of things has already decreed, and the propriety of which irresistibly flows from the circumstances of the case. Montesquieu says, that “in a free state every man will be his own legislator*.” This is not true, setting apart the functions of the community, unless in the limited sense already explained. It is the office of conscience to determine, “not like an Asiatic *cadi*, according to the ebbs and flows of his own passions, but like a British judge, who makes no new law, but faithfully declares that law which he finds already written†.”

Society can declare and interpret, but cannot enact

BOOK III. CHAP. V.

The same distinction is to be made upon the subject of authority. All political power is strictly speaking executive. It has appeared to be necessary, with respect to men as we at present find them, that force should sometimes be employed in repressing injustice; and for the same reasons it appears that this force should as far as possible be vested in the community. To the public support of justice therefore the authority of the community extends. But no sooner does it wander in the smallest degree from the great line of justice, than its authority is at an end, it stands upon a level with the obscurest individual, and every man is bound to resist its decisions.

Its authority only executive

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. VI.

OF OBEDIENCE

obedience not the correlative of authority.—no man bound to yield obedience to another.—case of submission considered.—foundation of obedience.—usefulness of social communication.—case of confidence consideredx2014its limits limitations.—mischief of unlimited confidence.—subjection explained.

HAVING enquired into the just and legitimate source of authority, we will next turn our attention to what has usually been considered as its correlative, obedience. This has always been found a subject of peculiar difficulty, as well in relation to the measure and extent of obedience, as to the source of our obligation to obey.

BOOK III. CHAP.
VI.

The true solution will probably be found in the observation that obedience is by no means the proper correlative. The object of government, as has been already demonstrated, is the exertion of force. Now force can never be regarded as an appeal to the understanding; and therefore obedience, which is an act of the understanding or will, can have no legitimate connection

Obedience not the
correlative of
authority

with it. I am bound to submit to justice and truth, because they approve themselves to my judgment. I am bound to co-operate with government, as far as it appears to me to coincide with these principles. But I submit to government when I think it erroneous, merely because I have no remedy.

BOOK III. CHAP.
VI.

No truth can be more simple, at the same time that no truth has been more darkened by the glosses of interested individuals, than that one man can in no case be bound to yield obedience to any other man or set of men upon earth.

No man bound to
yield obedience to
another

There is one rule to which we are universally bound to conform ourselves, justice, the treating every man precisely as his usefulness and worth demand, the acting under every circumstance in the manner that shall procure the greatest quantity of general good. When we have done thus, what province is there left to the disposal of obedience?

I am summoned to appear before the magistrate to answer for a libel, an imaginary crime, an act which perhaps I am convinced ought in no case to fall under the animadversion of law. I comply with this summons. My compliance proceeds, perhaps from a conviction that the arguments I shall exhibit in the court form the best resistance I can give to his injustice, or perhaps

Case of submission
considered

from perceiving that my non-compliance would frivolously and without real use interrupt the public tranquillity.

BOOK III. CHAP.
VI.

A quaker refuses to pay tithes. He therefore suffers a tithe proctor to distrain upon his goods. In this action morally speaking he does wrong. The distinction he makes is the argument of a mind that delights in trifles. That which will be taken from me by force, it is no breach of morality to deliver with my own hand. The money which the robber extorts from me, I do not think it necessary to oblige him to take from my person. If I walk quietly to the gallows, this does not imply my consent to be hanged.

In all these cases there is a clear distinction between my compliance with justice and my compliance with injustice. I conform to the principles of justice, because I perceive them to be intrinsically and unalterably right. I yield to injustice, though I perceive that to which I yield to be abstractedly wrong, and only choose the least among inevitable evils.

The case of volition, as it is commonly termed, seems parallel to that of intellect. You present a certain proposition to my mind, to which you require my assent. If you accompany the proposition with evidence calculated to shew the agreement between the terms of which it consists, you may obtain my assent. If you accompany the proposition with authority, telling me

Foundation of
obedience

that you have examined it and find it to be true, that thousands of wise and disinterested men have admitted it, that angels or Gods have affirmed it, I may assent to your authority; but, with respect to the proposition itself, my understanding of its reasonableness, my perception of that in the proposition which strictly speaking constitutes its truth or its falshood, remain just as they did. I believe something else, but I do not believe the proposition.

BOOK III. CHAP.
VI.

Just so in morals. I may be persuaded of the propriety of yielding compliance to a requisition the justice of which I cannot discern, as I may be persuaded to yield compliance to a requisition which I know to be unjust. But neither of these requisitions is strictly speaking a proper subject of obedience. Obedience seems rather to imply the unforced choice of the mind and assent of the judgment. But the compliance I yield to government, independently of my approbation of its measures, is of the same species as my compliance with a wild beast, that forces me to run north, when my judgment and inclination prompted me to go south.

But, though morality in its purest construction altogether excludes the idea of one man's yielding obedience to another, yet the greatest benefits will result from mutual communication.

Usefulness of social
communication

There is scarcely any man, whose communications will not sometimes enlighten my judgment and rectify my conduct. But the persons to whom it becomes me to pay particular attention in this respect, are not such as may exercise any particular magistracy, but such, whatever may be their station, as are wiser or better informed in any respect than myself.

BOOK III. CHAP.
VI.

There are two ways in which a man wiser than myself may be of use to me; by the communication of those arguments by which he is convinced of the truth of the judgments he has formed; and by the communication of the judgments themselves independent of argument. This last is of use only in respect to the narrowness of our own understandings, and the time that might be requisite for the acquisition of a science of which we are at present ignorant. On this account I am not to be blamed, if I employ a builder to construct me a house, or a mechanic to sink me a well; nor should I be liable to blame, if I worked in person under their direction. In this case, not having opportunity or ability to acquire the science myself, I trust to the science of another. I choose from the deliberation of my own judgment the end to be pursued; I am convinced that the end is good and commendable; and, having done this, I commit the selection of means to a person whose qualifications are superior to my own. The confidence reposed in this instance is precisely of the nature of delegation in general. No term surely can be more unapt than that of obedience, to express our duty towards the overseer we have appointed in our affairs.

Case of confidence considered

Similar to the confidence I repose in a skilful mechanic is the attention which ought to be paid to the commander of an army. It is my duty in the first place to be satisfied of the goodness of the cause, of the propriety of the war, and of the truth of as many general propositions concerning the conduct of it, as can possibly be brought within the sphere of my understanding. It may well be doubted whether secrecy be in any degree necessary to the conduct of war. It may be doubted whether treachery and surprise are to be classed among the legitimate means of defeating our adversary. But after every deduction has been made for considerations of this sort, there will still remain cases, where something must be confided, as to the plan of a campaign or the arrangement of a battle, to the skill, so far as that skill really exists, of the commander. When he has explained both to the utmost of his ability, there may remain parts, the propriety of which I cannot fully comprehend, but which I have sufficient reason to confide to his judgment.

BOOK III. CHAP. VI.

This doctrine however of limited obedience, or, as it may more properly be termed, of confidence and delegation, ought to be called into action as seldom as possible. Every man should discharge to the utmost practicable extent the duties which arise from his situation. If he gain as to the ability with which they may be discharged, when he delegates them to another, he loses with respect to the fidelity; every one being conscious of the sincerity of his own intention, and no one having equal proof of that of another. A virtuous man will not fail to perceive the obligation under which he is placed to exert his own understanding, and to judge for himself as widely as his circumstances will permit.

Its limitations

BOOK III. CHAP. VI.

The abuse of the doctrine of confidence has been the source of more calamities to mankind than all the other errors of the human understanding. Depravity would have gained little ground in the world, if every man had been in the exercise of his independent judgment. The

Mischief of unlimited confidence

instrument by which extensive mischiefs have in all ages been perpetrated has been, the principle of many men being reduced to mere machines in the hands of a few. Man, while he consults his own understanding, is the ornament of the universe. Man, when he surrenders his reason, and becomes the partisan of implicit faith and passive obedience, is the most mischievous of all animals. Ceasing to examine every proposition that comes before him for the direction of his conduct, he is no longer the capable subject of moral instruction. He is, in the instant of submission, the blind instrument of every nefarious purpose of his principal; and, when left to himself, is open to the seduction of injustice, cruelty and profligacy.

These reasonings lead to a proper explanation of the word subject. If by the subject of any government we mean a person whose duty it is to obey, the true inference from the preceding principles is, that no government has any subjects. If on the contrary we mean a person, whom the government is bound to

Subjection explained

protect, or may justly restrain, the word is sufficiently admissible. This remark enables us to solve the long-disputed question, what it is that constitutes a man the subject of any government. Every man is in this sense a subject, whom the government is competent to protect on the one hand, or who on the other, by the violence of his proceedings, renders force requisite to prevent him from disturbing that community, for the preservation of whose peace the government is instituted.

BOOK III. CHAP.
VI.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

APPENDIX

moral principles frequently elucidated by incidental reflection—by incidental passages in various authors.—example.

IT will generally be found that, even where the truth upon any subject has been most industriously obscured, its occasional irradiations have not been wholly excluded. The mind has no sooner obtained evidence of any new truth, especially in the science of morals, but it recollects numerous intimations of that truth which have occasionally suggested themselves, and is astonished that a discovery which was perpetually upon the eve of being made, should have been kept at a distance so long.

BOOK III. CHAP.
VI. Appendix Moral principles frequently elucidated by incidental reflection:

This is eminently the case in the subject of which we are treating. Those numerous passages in poets, divines* and philosophers, which have placed our unalterable duty in the strongest contrast with the precarious authority of a superior, and have taught us to disclaim all subordination to the latter, have always been received by the ingenuous mind with a tumult of applause. There is indeed no species of composition, in which the seeds of a morality too perfect for our present improvements in science, may more reasonably be expected to discover themselves, than in works of imagination. When the mind shakes off the fetters of prescription and prejudice, when it boldly takes a flight into the world unknown, and employs itself in search of those grand and interesting principles which shall tend to impart to every reader the glow of enthusiasm, it is at such moments that the enquiring and philosophical reader may expect to be presented with the materials and rude sketches of intellectual improvement* .

by incidental passages in various authors

BOOK III. CHAP.
VI. Appendix

Among the many passages from writers of every denomination that will readily suggest themselves under this head to a well informed mind, we may naturally recollect the spirited reasoning of young Norval in the tragedy of Douglas, when he is called upon by lord Randolph to state the particulars of a contest in which he is engaged, that lord Randolph may be able to decide between the disputants.

Example

BOOK III. CHAP.
VI. Appendix

“Nay, my good lord, though I revere you much,
My cause I plead not, nor demand your judgment.
To the liege lord of my dear native land
I owe a subject's homage; but even him
And his high arbitration I reject. Within my bosom reigns another lord—
Honour; sole judge and umpire of itself.”

Act IV.

Nothing can be more accurate than a considerable part of the philosophy of this passage. The term “honour” indeed has been too much abused, and presents to the mind too fantastical an image, to be fairly descriptive of that principle by which the actions of every intellectual being ought to be regulated. The principle to which it behoves us to attend, is the internal decision of our own understanding; and nothing can be more evident than that the same reasoning, which led Norval to reject the authority of his sovereign in the quarrels and disputes in which he was engaged, ought to have led him to reject it as the regulator of any of his actions, and of consequence to abjure that homage which he sets out with reserving. Virtue cannot possibly be measured by the judgment and good pleasure of any man with whom we are concerned.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. VII.

OF FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

argument in favour of a variety of forms—compared with the argument in favour of a variety of religious creeds.—that there is one best form of government proved—from the unity of truth—from the nature of man’s objection from human weakness and prejudice.—danger in establishing an imperfect code.—manners of nations produced by their forms of government.—gradual improvement necessary.—simplicity chiefly to be desired.—publication of truth the grand instrument—by individuals, not by government—the truth entire, and not by parcels.—sort of progress to be desired.

APROPOSITION that by many political reasoners has been vehemently maintained, is that of the propriety of instituting different political governments suited to the characters, the habits and prejudices of different nations. “The English constitution,” say these reasoners, “is adapted to the thoughtful, rough and unsubmitting character of this island race; the

BOOK III. CHAP. VII. Argument in favour of a variety of forms:

slowness and complication of Dutch formality to the phlegmatic Hollander; and the splendour of the *grand monarque* to the vivacity of Frenchmen. Among the ancients what could be

BOOK III. CHAP. VII.

better assorted than a pure democracy to the intellectual acuteness and impetuous energy of the Athenians; while the hardy and unpolished Spartan flourished much more under the rugged and inflexible discipline of Lycurgus? The great art of the legislator is to penetrate into the true character of the nation with whom he is concerned, and to discover the exact structure of government which is calculated to render that nation flourishing and happy.” Accordingly an Englishman who should reason upon these postulates might say, “It is not necessary I should assert the English constitution to be the happiest and sublimest conception of the human mind; I do not enquire into the abstract excellence of that government under which France made herself illustrious for centuries. I contemplate with enthusiasm the venerable republics of Greece and Rome. But I am an enemy to the removing ancient land-marks, and disturbing without crude devices the wisdom of ages. I regard with horror the Quixote plan, that would reduce the irregular greatness of nations to the frigid and impracticable standard of metaphysical accuracy*.”

This question has been anticipated in various parts of the present work; but the argument is so popular and plausible to a superficial view, as justly to entitle it to a separate examination.

BOOK III. CHAP. VII.

The idea bears some resemblance to one which was formerly insisted upon by certain latitudinarians in religion. “It is impious,” said they, “to endeavour to reduce all men to uniformity of opinion upon this subject. Men’s minds are as

compared with the argument in favour of

various as their faces. God has made them so; and it is to be presumed that he is well pleased to be addressed in different languages, by different names, and with the consenting ardour of disagreeing sects.” Thus did these reasoners confound the majesty of truth with the deformity of falshood; and suppose that that being who was all truth, took delight in the errors, the absurdities, and the vices, for all falshood in some way or other engenders vice, of his creatures. At the same time they were employed in unnerving that activity of mind, which is the single source of human improvement. If truth and falshood be in reality upon a level, I shall be very weakly employed in a strenuous endeavour either to discover truth for myself, or to impress it upon others.

a variety of religious creeds

Truth is in reality single and uniform. There must in the nature of things be one best form of government, which all intellects, sufficiently roused from the slumber of savage ignorance, will be irresistibly incited to approve. If an equal participation of the benefits of nature be good in itself, it must be good for you and me and all mankind. Despotism may be of use to keep human beings in ignorance, but can never conduce to render them wise or virtuous or happy. If the general tendency of despotism be injurious, every portion and fragment of it must be a noxious ingredient. Truth cannot be so variable, as to change its nature by crossing an arm of the sea, a petty brook or an ideal line, and become falshood. On the contrary it is at all times and in all places the same.

That there is one best

BOOK III. CHAP.
VII. form of
government proved:

from the unity of
truth:

The subject of legislation is every where the same, man. The points in which human beings resemble are infinitely more considerable than those in which they differ. We have the same senses, the same inlets of pleasure and pain, the same faculty to reason, to judge and to infer. The same causes that make me happy will make you happy. We may differ in our opinions upon this subject at first, but this difference is only in prejudice, and is by no means invincible. An event may often conduce most to the benefit of a human being, which his erroneous judgment perhaps regarded with least complacency. A wise superintendent of affairs would pursue with steady attention the real advantage of those over whom he presided, careless of the temporary disapprobation he incurred, and which would last no longer than the partial and misguided apprehension from which it flowed.

from the nature of
man

BOOK III. CHAP.
VII.

Is there a country in which a prudent director of education would propose some other object for his labours than to make his pupil temperate and just and wise? Is there a climate that requires its inhabitants to be hard drinkers or horse-jockies or gamesters or bullies, rather than men? Can there be a corner of the world, where the lover of justice and truth would find himself out of his element and useless? If no; then liberty must be every where better than slavery, and the government of rectitude and impartiality better than the government of caprice.

But to this it may be objected that “men may not be every

where capable of liberty. A gift however valuable in itself, if it be intended to be beneficial, must be adapted to the capacity of the receiver. In human affairs every thing must be gradual; and it is contrary to every idea that experience furnishes of the nature of mind to expect to advance men to a state of perfection at once. It was in a spirit somewhat similar to this, that Solon, the Athenian lawgiver, apologised for the imperfection of his code, saying, “that he had not sought to promulgate such laws as were good in themselves, but such as his countrymen were able to bear.”

Objection from human weakness and prejudice

The experiment of Solon seems to be of a dangerous nature.

A code, such as his, bid fair for permanence, and does not appear to have contained in it a principle of improvement. He did not meditate that gradual progress which was above described, nor contemplate in the Athenians of his own time, the root from which were to spring the possible Athenians of some future period, who might realise all that he was able to conceive of good sense, fortitude and virtue. His institutions were rather calculated to hold them down in perpetuity to one certain degree of excellence and no more.

Danger in establishing an imperfect code

BOOK III. CHAP. VII.

This suggestion furnishes us with the real clue to that striking coincidence between the manners of a nation and the form of its government, which was mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, and which has furnished so capital an argument to the

Manners of nations produced by their forms of government

advocates for the local propriety of different forms of government. It was in reality somewhat illogical in these reasoners to employ this as an argument upon the subject, without previously ascertaining which of the two things was to be regarded as a cause and which as an effect, whether the government arose out of the manners of the nation, or the manners of the nation out of the government. The last of these statements appears upon the whole to be nearest to the fact. The government may be indebted for its existence to accident or force. Revolutions, as they have most frequently taken place in the world, are epochs, in which the temper and wishes of a nation are least consulted*. When it is otherwise, still the real effect of the government which is instituted, is to perpetuate propensities and sentiments, which without its operation would speedily have given place to other propensities. Upon every supposition, the existing correspondence between national character and national government will be found in a just consideration to arise out of the latter.

BOOK III. CHAP. VII.

The principle of gradual improvement advanced in the last cited objection must be admitted for true; but then it is necessary, while we adopt it, that we should not suffer ourselves to act in direct opposition to it; and that we should choose the best and most powerful means for forwarding that improvement.

Gradual improvement necessary

Man is in a state of perpetual progress. He must grow either better or worse, either correct his habits or confirm them. The government proposed must either increase our passions and prejudices by fanning the flame, or by gradually discouraging

Simplicity chiefly to be desired

tend to extirpate them. In reality, it is sufficiently difficult to imagine a government that shall have the latter tendency. By its very nature political institution has a tendency to suspend the elasticity, and put an end to the advancement of mind. Every scheme for embodying imperfection must be injurious. That which is to-day a considerable melioration, will at some future period, if preserved unaltered, appear a defect and disease in the body politic. It were earnestly to be desired that each man was wise enough to govern himself without the intervention of any compulsory restraint; and, since government even in its best state is an evil, the object principally to be aimed at is, that we should have as little of it as the general peace of human society will permit.

BOOK III. CHAP.
VII.

But the grand instrument for forwarding the improvement of mind is the publication of truth. Not the publication on the part of government; for it is infinitely difficult to discover infallibly what the truth is, especially upon controverted points, and government is as liable as individuals to be mistaken in this respect. In reality it is more liable; for the depositaries of government have a very obvious temptation to desire, by means of ignorance and implicit faith, to perpetuate the existing state of things. The only substantial method for the propagation of truth is discussion, so that the errors of one man may be detected by the acuteness and severe disquisition of his neighbours. All we have to demand from the officers of government, at least in their public character, is neutrality. The intervention of authority in a field proper to reasoning and demonstration is always injurious. If on the right side, it can only discredit truth, and call off the attention of men to a foreign consideration. If on the wrong, though it may not be able to suppress the spirit of enquiry, it will have a tendency to convert the calm pursuit of knowledge into passion and tumult.

Publication of truth
the grand instrument:

by individuals, not by
government:

“But in what manner shall the principles of truth be communicated so as best to lead to the practice? By shewing to man kind truth in all its evidence, or concealing one half of it? Shall

the truth entire, and
not by parcels

they be initiated by a partial discovery, and thus led on by regular degrees to conclusions that would at first have wholly alienated their minds?”

BOOK III. CHAP.
VII.

This question will come to be more fully discussed in a following chapter. In the mean time let us only consider for the present the quantity of effect that may be expected from these two opposite plans.

An inhabitant of Turkey or Morocco may perhaps be of opinion, that the vesting power in the arbitrary will or caprice of an individual has in it more advantages than disadvantages. If I be desirous to change his opinion, should I undertake to recommend to him in animated language some modification of this caprice? I should attack it in its principle. If I do otherwise, I shall betray the strength of my cause. The principle opposite to his own, will not possess half the irresistible force which I could have given to it. His objections will assume vigour. The principle I am maintaining

being half truth and half falshood, he will in every step of the contest possess an advantage in the offensive, of which, if he be sufficiently acute, I can never deprive him.

Now the principle I should have to explain of equal law and equal justice to the inhabitant of Morocco, would be as new to him, as any principle of the boldest political description that I could propagate in this country. Whatever apparent difference may exist between the two cases, may fairly be suspected to owe its existence to the imagination of the observer. The rule therefore which suggests itself in this case is fitted for universal application.

BOOK III. CHAP.
VII.

As to the improvements which are to be introduced into the political system, their quantity and their period must be determined by the degree of knowledge existing in any country, and the state of preparation of the public mind for the changes that are to be desired. Political renovation may strictly be considered as one of the stages in intellectual improvement. Literature and disquisition cannot of themselves be rendered sufficiently general; it will be only the cruder and grosser parts that can be expected to descend in their genuine form to the multitude; while those abstract and bold speculations, in which the value of literature principally consists, must necessarily continue the portion of the favoured few. It is here that social institution offers itself in aid of the abstruser powers of argumentative communication. As soon as any important truth has become established to a sufficient extent in the minds of the enterprising and the wise, it may tranquilly and with ease be rendered a part of the general system; since the uninstructed and the poor are never the strenuous supporters of those complicated systems by which oppression is maintained; and since they have an obvious interest in the practical introduction of simplicity and truth. One valuable principle being thus realised, prepares the way for the realising of more. It serves as a resting-place to the human mind in its great business of exploring the regions of truth, and gives it new alacrity and encouragement for farther exertions.

Sort of progress to be
desired

BOOK III. CHAP.
VII.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

An
ENQUIRY
Concerning
POLITICAL JUSTICE

Book Iv.
MISCELLANEOUS PRINCIPLES

CHAP. I.

OF RESISTANCE

every individual the judge of his own resistance.—objection.—answered from the nature of government.—from the modes of resistance.—1. force rarely to be employed—either where there is small prospect of success or where the prospect is great.—history of Charles the first estimated.—2. reasoning the legitimate mode.

IT has appeared in the course of our reasonings upon political authority, that every man is bound to resist every unjust proceeding on the part of the community. But who is the judge of this injustice? The question answers itself: the private judgment of the individual. Were it not so, the appeal would be nugatory, for we have no infallible judge to whom to refer our controversies. He is obliged to consult his own private judgment in this case, for the same reason that obliges him to consult it in every other article of his conduct.

BOOK IV. CHAP. I.
Every individual the

BOOK IV. CHAP. I.
judge of his own
resistance

“But is not this position necessarily subversive of all government? Can there be a power to rule, where no man is bound to obey; or at least where every man is to consult his own understanding first, and then to yield his concurrence no farther than he shall conceive the regulation to be just? The very idea of government is that of an authority superseding private judgment; how then can the exercise of private judgment be left entire? What degree of order is to be expected in a community, where every man is taught to indulge his own speculations, and even to resist the decision of the whole, whenever that decision is opposed to the dictates of his own fancy?”

Objection

The true answer to these questions lies in the observation with which we began our disquisition on government, that this boasted institution is nothing more than a scheme for enforcing by brute violence the sense of one man or set of men upon another, necessary to be employed in certain cases of peculiar emergency. Supposing the question then to lie

Answered from the
nature of government:

merely between the force of the community on one part, and the force with which any individual member should think it incumbent upon him to resist their decisions on the other, it is sufficiently evident that a certain kind of authority and supremacy would be the result. But this is not the true state of the question.

BOOK IV. CHAP. I.

It is farther evident, that, though the duty of every man to exercise his private judgment be unalterable, yet so far as relates to practice, wherever government subsists, the exercise of private judgment is substantially intrenched upon. The force put by the community upon those who exercise rapine and injustice, and the influence of that force as a moral motive upon its members in general, are each of them exhibitions of an argument, not founded in general reason, but in the precarious interference of a fallible individual. Nor is this all. Without anticipating the question of the different kinds of resistance and the election that it may be our duty to make of one kind rather than another, it is certain in fact, that my conduct will be materially altered by the foresight that, if I act in a certain manner, I shall have the combined force of a number of individuals to oppose me. That government therefore is the best, which in no one instance interferes with the exercise of private judgment without absolute necessity.

The modes according to which an individual may oppose any measure which his judgment disapproves are of two sorts, action and speech. Shall he upon every occasion have recourse to the former? This it is absurd so much as to suppose. The object of every virtuous man is the general good. But how can he be said to promote the general good, who is ready to waste his active force upon every trivial occasion, and sacrifice his life without the chance of any public benefit?

from the modes of resistance.

1. Force rarely to be employed,

BOOK IV. CHAP. I.

“But he reserves himself,” I will suppose, “for some great occasion; and then, careless as to success, which is a large object only to little minds, generously embarks in a cause where he has no hope but to perish. He becomes the martyr of truth. He believes that such an example will tend to impress the minds of his fellow men, and to rouse them from their lethargy.”

either where there is small prospect of success,

The question of martyrdom is of a difficult nature. I had rather convince men by my arguments, than seduce them by my example. It is scarcely possible for me to tell what opportunities for usefulness may offer themselves in the future years of my existence. Nor is it improbable in a general consideration that long and persevering services may be more advantageous than brilliant and transitory ones. The case being thus circumstanced, a truly wise man cannot fail to hesitate as to the idea of offering up his life a voluntary oblation.

Whenever martyrdom becomes an indispensable duty, when nothing can preserve him short of the clearest dereliction of principle and the most palpable desertion of truth, he will then meet it with perfect serenity. He did not avoid it before from any

BOOK IV. CHAP. I.

weakness of personal feeling. When it must be encountered, he knows that it is indebted for that lustre which has been so generally acknowledged among mankind, to the intrepidity of the sufferer. He knows that nothing is so essential to true virtue, as an utter disregard to individual advantage.

The objections that offer themselves to an exertion of actual force, where there are no hopes of success, are numerous. Such an exertion cannot be made without injury to the lives of more than a single individual. A certain number both of enemies and friends must be expected to be the victims of so wild an undertaking. It is regarded by contemporaries, and recorded by history as an intemperate ebullition of the passions; and serves rather as a beacon to deter others, than as a motive to animate them. It is not the frenzy of enthusiasm, but the calm, sagacious and deliberate effort of reason, to which truth must be indebted for its progress.

But let us suppose, “that the prospect of success is considerable, and that there is reason to believe that resolute violence may in no long time accomplish its purpose.” Even here we may be allowed to hesitate. Force has already appeared to be an odious weapon; and, if the use of it be to be regretted in the hands of government, it does not change its nature though wielded by a band of patriots. If the cause we plead be the cause of truth,

or where the prospect is great

there is no doubt that by our reasonings, if sufficiently zealous and constant, the same purpose may be effected in a milder and more liberal way* .

BOOK IV. CHAP. I.

In a word, it is proper to recollect here what has been established as to the doctrine of force in general, that it is in no case to be employed but where every other means is ineffectual. In the question therefore of resistance to government, force ought never to be introduced without the most imminent necessity; never but in circumstances similar to those of defending my life from a ruffian, where time can by no means be gained, and the consequences instantly to ensue are unquestionably fatal.

The history of king Charles the first furnishes an instructive example in both kinds. The original design of his opponents was that of confining his power within narrow and palpable limits.

History of Charles the first estimated

This object, after a struggle of many years, was fully accomplished by the parliament of 1640, without bloodshed (except indeed in the single instance of lord Strafford) and without commotion. They next conceived the project of overturning the hierarchy and the monarchy of England, in opposition to great numbers, and in the last point no doubt to a majority of their countrymen. Admitting these objects to have been in the utmost degree excellent, they ought not, for the purpose of obtaining them, to have precipitated the question to the extremity of a civil war.

“But, since force is scarcely under any circumstances to be employed, of what nature is that resistance which ought constantly to be given to every instance of injustice?” The resistance I am bound to employ is that of uttering the truth, of censuring in the most explicit manner every proceeding that I perceive to be adverse

2. Reasoning the legitimate mode

to the true interests of mankind. I am bound to disseminate without reserve all the principles with which I am acquainted, and which it may be of importance to mankind to know; and this duty it behoves me to practice upon every occasion and with the most persevering constancy. I must disclose the whole system of moral and political truth, without suppressing any part under the idea of its being too bold and paradoxical, and thus depriving the whole of that complete and irresistible evidence, without which its effects must always be feeble, partial and uncertain.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. II.

OF REVOLUTIONS

SECTION I.

DUTIES OF A CITIZEN

obligation to support the constitution of our country considered—must arise either from the reason of the case, or from a personal and local consideration.—the first examined.—the second.

NO question can be more important than that which respects the best mode of effecting revolutions. Before we enter upon it however, it may be proper to remove a difficulty which has suggested itself to the minds of some men, how far we ought generally speaking to be the friends of revolution; or, in other words, whether it be justifiable in a man to be the enemy of the constitution of his country.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section I. Obligation
to support the
constitution of our
country considered:

“We live,” it will be said, “under the protection of this constitution; and protection, being a benefit conferred, obliges us to a reciprocation of support in return.”

To this it may be answered, first, that this protection is a very equivocal thing; and, till it can be shown that the vices, from the effects of which it protects us, are not for the most part the produce of that constitution, we shall never sufficiently understand the quantity of benefit it includes.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section I.

Secondly, gratitude, as has already been proved^{*}, is a vice and not a virtue. Every man and every collection of men ought to be treated by us in a manner founded upon their intrinsic qualities and capacities, and not according to a rule which has existence only in relation to ourselves.

Add to this, thirdly, that no motive can be more equivocal than the gratitude here recommended. Gratitude to the constitution, an abstract idea, an imaginary existence, is altogether unintelligible. Affection to my countrymen will be much better proved, by my exertions to procure them a substantial benefit, than by my supporting a system which I believe to be fraught with injurious consequences.

He who calls upon me to support the constitution must found his requisition upon one of two principles. It has a claim upon my support either because it is good, or because it is British.

must arise either from
the reason of the case,
or from a personal

Against the requisition in the first sense there is nothing to object. All that is necessary is to prove the goodness which is ascribed to it. But perhaps it will be said, “that, though not absolutely good, more mischief will result from an attempt to overturn it, than from maintaining it with its mixed character of partly right and partly wrong.” If this can be made evident, undoubtedly I ought to submit. Of this mischief however I can be no judge but in consequence of enquiry. To some the evils attendant on a revolution will appear greater, and to others less. Some will imagine that the vices with which the English constitution is pregnant are considerable, and some that it is nearly innocent. Before I can decide between these opposite opinions and balance the existing and the possible evils, I must examine for myself. But examination in its nature implies uncertainty of result. Were I to determine before I sat down on which side the decision should be, I could not strictly speaking be said to examine at all. He that desires a revolution for its own sake is to be regarded as a madman. He that desires it from a thorough conviction of its usefulness and necessity has a claim upon us for candour and respect.

and local
consideration

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section I. The first
examined

As to the demand upon me for support to the English constitution, because it is English, there is little plausibility in this argument. It is of the same nature as the demand upon me to be a Christian, because I am a Briton, or a Mahometan, because I am a native of Turkey. Instead of being an expression of respect,

The second

it argues contempt of all government, religion and virtue, and every thing that is sacred among men. If there be such a thing as truth, it must be better than error. If there be such a faculty as reason, it ought to be exerted. But this demand makes truth a matter of absolute indifference, and forbids us the exercise of our reason. If men reason and reflect, it must necessarily happen that either the Englishman or the Turk will find his government to be odious and his religion false. For what purpose employ his reason, if he must for ever conceal the conclusions to which it leads him? How would man have arrived at his present attainments, if he had always been contented with the state of society in which he happened to be born? In a word, either reason is the curse of our species, and human nature is to be regarded with horror; or it becomes us to employ our understanding and to act upon it, and to follow truth wherever it may lead us. It cannot lead us to mischief, since utility, as it regards percipient beings, is the only basis of moral and political truth.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section I.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

SECTION II.

MODE OF EFFECTING REVOLUTIONS

persuasion the proper instrument—not violence—nor resentment.—lateness of event desirable.

TO return to the enquiry respecting the mode of effecting revolutions. If no question can be more important, there is fortunately no question perhaps that admits of a more complete and satisfactory general answer. The revolutions of states, which a philanthropist would desire to witness, or in which he would willingly co-operate, consist principally in a change of sentiments and dispositions in the members of those states. The true instruments for changing the opinions of men are argument and persuasion. The best security for an advantageous issue is free and unrestricted discussion. In that field truth must always prove the successful champion. If then we would improve the social institutions of mankind, we must write, we must argue, we must converse. To this business there is no close; in this pursuit there should be no pause. Every method should be employed,—not so much positively to allure the attention of mankind, or persuasively to invite them to the adoption of our opinions,—as to remove every restraint upon thought, and to throw open the temple of science and the field of enquiry to all the world.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section II. Persuasion
the proper instrument:

Those instruments will always be regarded by the discerning mind as suspicious, which may be employed with equal prospect of success on both sides of every question. This consideration should make us look with aversion upon all resources of violence. When we descend into the listed field, we of course desert the vantage ground of truth, and commit the decision to uncertainty and caprice. The phalanx of reason is invulnerable; it advances with deliberate and determined pace; and nothing is able to resist it. But when we lay down our arguments, and take up our swords, the case is altered. Amidst the barbarous pomp of war and the clamorous din of civil brawls, who can tell whether the event shall be prosperous or miserable?

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section II.

not violence:

We must therefore carefully distinguish between informing the people and inflaming them. Indignation, resentment and fury are to be deprecated; and all we should ask is sober thought, clear discernment and intrepid discussion. Why were the revolutions of America and France a general concert of all orders and descriptions of men, without so much (if we bear in mind the multitudes concerned) as almost a dissentient voice; while the resistance against our Charles the first divided the nation into two equal parts? Because the latter was the affair of the seventeenth century, and the former happened in the close of the

nor resentment

eighteenth. Because in the case of America and France philosophy had already developed some of the great principles of political truth, and Sydney and Locke and Montesquieu and Rousseau had convinced a majority of reflecting and powerful minds of the evils of usurpation. If these revolutions had happened still later, not one drop of the blood of one citizen would have been shed by the hands of another, nor would the event have been marked so much perhaps as with one solitary instance of violence and confiscation.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section II.

There are two principles therefore which the man who desires the regeneration of his species ought ever to bear in mind, to regard the improvement of every hour as essential in the discovery and dissemination of truth, and willingly to suffer the lapse of years before he urges the reducing his theory into actual execution. With all his caution it is possible that the impetuous multitude will run before the still and quiet progress of reason; nor will he sternly pass sentence upon every revolution that shall by a few years have anticipated the term that wisdom would have prescribed. But, if his caution be firmly exerted, there is no doubt that he will supersede many abortive attempts, and considerably prolong the general tranquillity.

Lateness of event
desirable

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

SECTION III.

OF POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS

meaning of the term.—associations objected to—1. from the sort of persons with whom a just revolution should originate—2. from the danger of tumult.—objects of association.—in what cases admissible—2014 argued for from then on the necessity to give weight to opinion—from their tendency to ascertain opinion.—unnecessary for these purposes.—general inutility.—concessions.—importance of social communication.—propriety of teaching resistance considered.

A QUESTION naturally suggests itself in this place respecting the propriety of associations among the people at large, for the purpose of effecting a change in their political institutions. It should be observed, that the associations here spoken of are voluntary confederacies of certain members of the society with each other, the tendency of which is to give weight to the opinions of the persons so associated, of which the opinions of the unconfederated and insulated part of the community are des

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III. Meaning
of the term

titute. This question therefore has nothing in common with that other, whether in a well organized state every individual would not find his place in a deliberative as well as an elective capacity; the society being distributed into districts and departments, and each man possessing an importance, not measured by the capricious standard of some accidental confederacy, but by a rule impartially applied to every member of the community.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section II.

Relative then to political associations, as thus explained, there are two considerations, which, if they do not afford reason for undistinguishing condemnation, at least tend to diminish our anxiety to their introduction.

Associations objected
to:

In the first place revolutions less originate in the energies of the people at large, than in the conceptions of persons of some degree of study and reflection. I say, originate, for it must be admitted, that they ought ultimately to be determined on by the choice of the whole nation. It is the property of truth to diffuse itself. The difficulty is to distinguish it in the first instance, and in the next to present it in that unequivocal form which shall enable it to command universal assent. This must necessarily be the task of a few. Society, as it at present exists in the world, will long be divided into two classes, those who have leisure for study, and those whose importunate necessities perpetually urge them to temporary industry. It is no doubt to be desired, that the latter class should be made as much as possible to partake of the privileges of the former. But we should be careful, while we listen to the undistinguishing demands of benevolence, that we do not occasion a greater mischief than that

1. from the sort of
persons with whom a
just revolution should
originate:

benevolence, that we do not occasion a greater mischief than that

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III.

we undertake to cure. We should be upon our guard against an event the consequences of which are always to be feared, the propagating blind zeal, where we meant to propagate reason.

The studious and reflecting only can be expected to see deeply into future events. To conceive an order of society totally different from that which is now before our eyes, and to judge of the advantages that would accrue from its institution, are the prerogatives only of a few favoured minds. When these advantages have been unfolded by superior penetration, they cannot yet for some time be expected to be understood by the multitude. Time, reading and conversation are necessary to render them familiar. They must descend in regular gradation from the most thoughtful to the most unobservant. He, that begins with an appeal to the people, may be suspected to understand little of the true character of mind. A sinister design may gain by precipitation; but true wisdom is best adapted to a slow, unvarying, incessant progress.

Human affairs, through every link of the great chain of necessity, are admirably harmonised and adapted to each other. As the people form the last step in the progress of truth, they need least preparation to induce them to assert it. Their prejudices are few and upon the surface. They are the higher orders of society, that find, or imagine they find, their advantage in injustice, and are eager to invent arguments for its defence. In sophistry they first seek an excuse for their conduct, and then become the redoubted champions of those errors which they have been assiduous to cultivate. The vulgar have no such interest, and submit to the reign of injustice from habit only and the want of reflection. They do not want preparation to receive the truth, so much as examples to embody it. A very short catalogue of reasons is sufficient for them, when they see the generous and the wise resolved to assert the cause of justice. A very short period is long enough for them to imbibe the sentiments of patriotism and liberty.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III.

Secondly, associations must be formed with great caution not to be allied to tumult. The conviviality of a feast may lead to the depredations of a riot. While the sympathy of opinion catches from man to man, especially in numerous meetings, and among persons whose passions have not been used to the curb of judgment, actions may be determined on, which solitary reflection would have rejected. There is nothing more barbarous, cruel and blood-thirsty, than the triumph of a mob. Sober thought should always prepare the way to the public assertion of truth. He, that would be the founder of a republic, should, like the first Brutus, be insensible to the energies of the most imperious passions of our nature.

2. from the danger of
tumult

Upon this subject of associations an obvious distinction is to be made. Those, who are dissatisfied with the government of their country, may aim either at the correction of old errors, or the counteracting of new encroachments. Both these objects are legitimate. The wise and the virtuous man ought to see things precisely as they are, and judge of the actual constitution of his country with the same impartiality, as if he had simply read of it in the remotest page of history.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III. Objects of
association

These two objects may be entitled to a different treatment. The first ought undoubtedly to proceed with a leisurely step and in all possible tranquillity. The second appears to require something more of activity. It is the characteristic of truth, to trust much to its own energy, and to resist invasion rather by the force of conviction than the force of arms. The individual oppressed seems however particularly entitled to our assistance, and this can best be afforded by the concurrence of many. The case may require an early and unequivocal display of opinion, and this perhaps will afford an apology for some sort of association, provided it be conducted with all possible attention to peaceableness and good order.

In what cases
admissible

Few arguments can be of equal importance with that which we are here discussing. Few mistakes can be more to be deplored than that which should induce us to employ immoral and injurious methods for the support of a good cause. It may be alledged, “that association is the only expedient for arming the sense of the country against the arts of its oppressors.” Why arm? Why spread a restless commotion over the face of a nation, which may lead to the most destructive consequences? Why seek to bestow upon truth a weight that is not her own? a weight that must always produce some obliquity, some blind and unenlightened zeal? In attempting prematurely to anticipate the conquest of truth, we shall infallibly give birth to deformity and abortion. If we have patience to wait her natural progress, and to assist her cause by no arguments that are not worthy of her, the event will be both certain and illustrious.

Argued for from the
necessity to give
weight to opinion:

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III.

A similar answer will suggest itself to the objection, “that associations are necessary unequivocally to ascertain the opinion of the people.” What sort of opinion is that, which thus stands in need of some sudden violence to oblige it to start from its hiding-place? The sentiments of mankind are then only equivocal in external appearance, when they are unformed and uncertain in the conception. When once the individual knows his own meaning, its symptoms will be clear and unequivocal. Be not precipitate. If the embryo sentiment at present existing in my mind be true, there is hope that it will gain strength by time. If you wish to assist its growth, let it be by instruction, not by attempting to pass that sentiment for mine which you only wish to be so. If the opinion of the people be not known to-day, it will not fail to shew itself to-morrow. If the opinion of the people be not known to-day, it is because that which you

from their tendency to
ascertain opinion.

Unnecessary for these
purposes

would have supposed to be their opinion is not sufficiently their opinion. You might as well think of hiding the inhabitants of England, concealing their towns and their cultivation, and making their country pass for a desert, as of concealing their real and deliberate sentiment.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III.

These are the expedients of men who do not know that truth is omnipotent. It may appear to die for a time, but it will not fail to revive with fresh vigour. If it have ever failed to produce gradual conviction, it is because it has been told in a meagre, an obscure or a pusillanimous manner. Ten pages that should contain an absolute demonstration of the true interests

General inutility

of mankind in society could no otherwise be prevented from changing the face of the globe, than by the literal destruction of the paper on which they were written. It would become us to repeat their contents as widely as we were able; but, if we attempted any thing more than this, it would be a practical proof that we did not know they contained a demonstration.

Such are the reasonings that should decide upon our abstract opinion of every case of association that comes before us. But, though from hence it should sufficiently appear that association is scarcely in any case to be desired, there are considerations that should lead us sometimes to judge it with moderation and forbearance. There is one mode, according to which the benefit of mankind

Concessions

may best be promoted, and which ought always to be employed. But mankind are imperfect beings, and there are certain errors of his species which a wise man will be inclined to regard with indulgence. Associations, as a measure intrinsically wrong, he will endeavour at least to postpone as long as he can. But it must not be dissembled that in the crisis of a revolution they will sometimes be unavoidable. While opinion is advancing with silent step, imagination and zeal may be expected somewhat to outrun her progress. Wisdom will be anxious to hold them at bay; and, if her votaries be many, she will be able to do this long enough to prevent tragical consequences. But, when the cast is thrown, when the declaration is made and irrevocable, she will not fail, be the confusion greater or less, to take the side of truth, and forward her reign by the best means that the necessity of the case will admit.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III.

But, though association, in the received sense of that term, must be granted to be an instrument of a very dangerous nature, it should be remembered that unreserved communication in a smaller circle, and especially among persons who are already awakened to the pursuit of truth, is of unquestionable advantage. There is at present in the world a cold reserve that keeps man at a distance from man. There is an art in the practice of which individuals communicate for ever, without any one telling his neighbour what estimate he should form of his attainments and character, how they ought to be employed, and how to be improved. There is a sort of domestic tactics, the object of which is to instruct us to elude curiosity, and to keep up the tenour of conversation, without the disclosure either of our feelings or our opinions. The philanthropist has no object more deeply at heart than the annihilation of this duplicity and reserve. No man can have much kindness for his species, who does not habituate himself to consider upon each successive occasion of social intercourse how that occasion may be most beneficently improved. Among the topics to which he will be anxious to awaken attention, politics will occupy a principal share.

Importance of social communication

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III.

Books have by their very nature but a limited operation; though, on account of their permanence, their methodical disquisition, and their easiness of access, they are entitled to the foremost place. But their efficacy ought not to engross our confidence. The number of those by whom reading is neglected is exceedingly great. Books to those by whom they are read have a sort of constitutional coldness. We review the

arguments of an “insolent innovator” with sullenness, and are unwilling to stretch our minds to take in all their force. It is with difficulty that we obtain the courage of striking into untrodden paths, and questioning tenets that have been generally received. But conversation accustoms us to hear a variety of sentiments, obliges us to exercise patience and attention, and gives freedom and elasticity to our mental disquisitions. A thinking man, if he will recollect his intellectual history, will find that he has derived inestimable advantage from the stimulus and surprise of colloquial suggestions; and, if he review the history of literature, will perceive that minds of great acuteness and ability have commonly existed in a cluster.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III.

It follows that the promising of the best interests of mankind eminently depends upon the freedom of social communication. Let us imagine to ourselves a number of individuals, who, having first stored their minds with reading and reflection, proceed afterwards in candid and unreserved conversation to compare their ideas, to suggest their doubts, to remove their difficulties, and to cultivate a collected and striking manner of delivering their sentiments. Let us suppose these men, prepared by mutual intercourse, to go forth to the world, to explain with succinctness and simplicity, and in a manner well calculated to arrest attention, the true principles of society. Let us suppose their hearers instigated in their turn to repeat these truths to their companions. We shall then have an idea of knowledge as perpetually gaining ground, unaccompanied with peril in the means of its diffusion. Reason will spread itself, and not a brute and unintelligent sympathy. Discussion perhaps never exists with so much vigour and utility as in the conversation of two persons. It may be carried on with advantage in small and friendly societies. Does the fewness of their numbers imply the rarity of their existence? Far otherwise: the time perhaps will come when such institutions will be universal. Shew to mankind by a few examples the advantages of political discussion undebauched by political enmity and vehemence, and the beauty of the spectacle will soon render the example contagious. Every man will commune with his neighbour. Every man will be eager to tell and to hear what the interest of all requires them to know. The bolts and fortifications of the temple of truth will be removed.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III.

The craggy steep of science, which it was before difficult to ascend, will be levelled with the plain. Knowledge will be accessible to all. Wisdom will be the inheritance of man, from which none will be excluded but by their own heedlessness and prodigality. If these ideas cannot completely be realised, till the inequality of conditions and the tyranny of government are rendered somewhat less oppressive, this affords no reason against the setting afloat so generous a system. The improvement of individuals and the melioration of political institutions are destined mutually to produce and reproduce each other. Truth, and above all political truth, is not hard of acquisition, but from the superciliousness of its professors. It has been slow and tedious of improvement, because the study of it has been relegated to doctors and civilians. It has produced little effect upon the practice of mankind, because it has not been allowed a plain and direct appeal to their understandings. Remove these obstacles, render it the common property, bring it into daily use, and you may reasonably promise yourself consequences of the most inestimable value.

But these consequences are the property only of independent and impartial discussion. If once the unambitious and candid circles of enquiring men be swallowed up in the insatiate gulf of noisy assemblies, the opportunity of improvement is instantly annihilated. The happy varieties of sentiment which so eminently contribute to intellectual acuteness are lost. Activity of thought is shackled by the fear that our associates should disclaim us. A fallacious uniformity of opinion is produced, which no man espouses from conviction, but which carries all men along with a resistless tide. Clubs, in the old English sense, that is, the periodical meeting of small and independent circles, may be admitted to fall within the line of these principles. But they cease to be admissible, when united with the tremendous apparatus of articles of confederacy and committees of correspondence. Human beings should meet together, not to enforce, but to enquire. Truth disclaims the alliance of marshalled numbers.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III.

It seems scarcely necessary to add, that the individuals who are engaged in the transactions here censured, have frequently been instigated by the best intentions, and informed with the most liberal views. It would be in the highest degree unjust, if their undertakings should be found of dangerous tendency, to involve the authors in indiscriminate censure for consequences which they did not foresee. But at the same time, in proportion to the purity of their views and the soundness of their principles, it were earnestly to be desired that they would seriously reflect on the means they employ. It would be deeply to be lamented, if those who were the truest friends to the welfare of mankind, should come, by the injudiciousness of their conduct, to rank among its enemies.

From what has been said it is sufficiently evident, that no alarm can be more groundless, than that of violence and precipitation from the enlightened advocates of political justice. There is however another objection which has been urged against them, built upon the supposed inexpediency of inculcating upon the people at large the propriety of occasional resistance to the authority of government. "Obedience," say these objectors "is the rule; resistance the exception. Now what can be more preposterous, than perpetually to insist with all the pomp of eloquence upon an expedient, to which only an extreme necessity can oblige us to have recourse*?"

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III. Propriety
of teaching resistance
considered

It has already been shewn that obedience, that is, a surrender of the understanding to the voice of authority, is a rule to which it can never be creditable to human beings to conform. Tranquillity indeed, a state in which a man shall least be disturbed in the exercise of his private judgment by the interposition of violence, is an object we should constantly endeavour to promote; but this tranquillity the principles here inculcated have little tendency to disturb.

There is certainly no truth which it can be for the general interest to conceal. It must be confessed indeed, that a single truth may be so detached from the series to which it belongs, as, when separately told, to have the nature of falshood. But this is by no means the case in the present instance. To inform mankind

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section III.

of those general principles upon which all political institutions ought to be built, is not to diffuse partial information. To discover to them their true interests, and lead them to conceive of a state of society more uncorrupt and more equitable than that in which they live, is not to inculcate some rare exception to a general rule. If there be any government which must be indebted for its perpetuity to ignorance, that government is the curse of mankind. In proportion as men are made to understand their true interests, they will conduct themselves wisely, both when they act and when they forbear, and their conduct will therefore promise the most advantageous issue. He, whose mind has carefully been inured to the dictates of reason, is of all men least likely to convert into the rash and headstrong invader of the general weal.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

SECTION IV.

OF THE SPECIES OF REFORM TO BE DESIRED

ought it to be partial or entire?—truth may not be partially taught.—partial reformation considered.—objection.—answer.—partial reform indispensable.—nature of a just revolution—howdistantnt?

THERE is one more question which cannot fail occasionally to suggest itself to the advocate of social reformation. “Ought we to desire to see this reformation introduced gradually or at once?” Neither side of this dilemma presents us with the proper expedient.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section IV. Ought it to be partial or entire?

No project can be more injurious to the cause of truth, than that of presenting it imperfectly and by parcels to the attention of mankind. Seen in its just light, the effect produced cannot fail to be considerable; but, shewn in some partial and imperfect way, it will afford a thousand advantages to its adversaries. Many objections will seem plausible, which a full view of the subject would have dissipated. Whatever limits truth is error; and of consequence such a limited view cannot fail to include a considerable mixture of error. Many ideas may be excellent as parts of a great whole, which, when violently torn from their connection, will not only cease to be excellent, but may in some cases become positively injurious. In this war of posts and skirmishes victory will perpetually appear to be doubtful, and men will either be persuaded, that truth itself is of little value, or that human intellect is so narrow as to render the discovery of truth a hopeless pursuit.

Truth may not be partially taught

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section IV.

It may be alledged, that “one of the considerations of greatest influence in human affairs is that of the gradual decline of ill things to worse, till at length the mischief, having proceeded to its highest climax, can maintain itself no longer.

Partial reformation considered.

Objection

The argument in favour of social improvement would lose much of its relative energy, if the opportunity of a secret comparison of possible good with actual evil were taken away. All partial reforms are of the nature of palliatives. They skin over the diseased part instead of extirpating the disease. By giving a small benefit, perhaps a benefit only in appearance, they cheat us of the superior good we ought to have demanded. By stripping error of a part of its enormities, they give it fresh vigour and a longer duration.”

We must be cautious however of pushing this argument too far. To suppose that truth stands in absolute need of a foil, or that she cannot produce full conviction by her native light, is a conception unworthy of her enlightened advocates. The true

Answer

solution will probably be found in the accurately distinguishing the sources of reform. Whatever reform, general or partial, shall be suggested to the community at large by an un mutilated view of the subject, ought to be seen with some degree of complacency. But a reform, that shall be offered us by those whose interest is supposed to lie in the perpetuating of abuse, and the intention of which is rather to give permanence to error by divesting it of its most odious features, is little entitled to our countenance. The true principle of social improvement lies in the correcting public opinion. Whatever reform is stolen upon the community unregarded, and does not spontaneously flow from the energy of the general mind, is unworthy of congratulation. It is in this respect with nations as with individuals. He that quits a vicious habit, not from reason and conviction, but because his appetites no longer solicit him to its indulgence, does not deserve the epithet of virtuous. The object it becomes us to pursue is, to give vigour to public opinion, not to sink it into listlessness and indifference.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section IV.

When partial reformation proceeds from its legitimate cause, the progress society has made in the acquisition of truth, it may frequently be entitled to our applause. Man is the creature of habits. Gradual improvement is a most conspicuous law of his nature. When therefore some considerable advantage is sufficiently understood by the community to induce them to

Gradual reform
indispensible

desire its establishment, that establishment will afterwards react to the enlightening of intellect and the generating of virtue. It is natural for us to take our stand upon some leading truth, and from thence explore the regions we have still to traverse.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section IV.

There is indeed a sense in which gradual improvement is the only alternative between reformation and no reformation. All human intellects are at sea upon the great ocean of infinite truth, and their voyage though attended with hourly advantage will never be at an end. If therefore we will stay till we shall have devised a reformation so complete, as shall need no farther reformation to render it more complete, we shall eternally remain in inaction. Whatever is fairly understood upon general principles by a considerable part of the community, and opposed by none or by a very few, may be considered as sufficiently ripe for execution.

To recapitulate the principal object of this chapter, I would once again repeat, that violence may suit the plan of any political partisan, rather than of him that pleads the cause of simple justice. There is even a sense in which the reform aimed at by the true politician may be affirmed to be less a gradual than an entire one, without contradicting the former position. The complete reformation that is wanted, is not instant but future reformation. It can in reality scarcely be considered as of the nature of action. It consists in an universal illumination. Men feel their situation, and the restraints, that shackled them before, vanish like a

Nature of a just
revolution

mere deception. When the true crisis shall come, not a sword will need to be drawn, not a finger to be lifted up. The adversaries will be too few and too feeble to dare to make a stand against the universal sense of mankind.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section IV.

Nor do these ideas imply, as at first sight they might seem to imply, that the revolution is at an immeasurable distance. It is of the nature of human affairs that great changes should appear to be sudden, and great discoveries to be made unexpectedly, and as it were by accident. In forming the mind of a young person, in endeavouring to give a new bent to that of a person of maturer years, I shall for a long time seem to have produced little effect, and the fruits will shew themselves when I least expected them. The kingdom of truth comes not with ostentation. The seeds of virtue may appear to perish before they germinate.

How distant?

To recur once more to the example of France, the works of her great political writers seemed for a long time to produce little prospect of any practical effect. Helvetius, one of the latest, in a work published after his death in 1771, laments in pathetic strains the hopeless condition of his country. "In the history of every people," says he, "there are moments, in which, uncertain of the side they shall choose, and balanced between political good and evil, they feel a desire to be instructed; in which the soil, so to express myself, is in some manner prepared, and may easily be impregnated with the dew of truth. At such a moment the publication of a valuable book may give birth to the most auspicious reforms: but, when that moment is no more, the nation, become insensible to the best motives, is by the nature of its government plunged deeper and deeper in ignorance and stupidity. The soil of intellect is then hard and impenetrable; the rains may fall, may spread their moisture upon the surface, but the prospect of fertility is gone. Such is the condition of France. Her people are become the contempt of Europe. No salutary crisis shall ever restore them to liberty*."

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section IV.

But in spite of these melancholy predictions, the work of renovation was in continual progress. The American revolution gave the finishing stroke, and only six years elapsed between the completion of American liberty and the commencement of the French revolution. Will a term longer than this be necessary, before France, the most refined and considerable nation in the world, will lead other nations to imitate and improve upon her plan? Let the true friend of man be incessant in the propagation of truth, and vigilant to counteract all the causes that might disturb the regularity of her progress, and he will have every reason to hope an early and a favourable event.

BOOK IV. CHAP. II.
Section IV.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. III.

OF TYRANNICIDE

diversity of opinions on this subject.—argument in its vindication.—the destruction of a tyrant not a case of exception.—consequences of tyrannicide.—assassination described.—importance of sincerity.

A QUESTION, connected with the mode of effecting revolutions, and which has been eagerly discussed among political reasoners, is that of tyrannicide. The moralists of antiquity warmly contended for the lawfulness of this practice; by the moderns it has generally been condemned.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
III. Diversity of
opinions on this
subject

The arguments in its favour are built upon a very obvious principle. “Justice ought universally to be administered. Upon lesser criminals it is done, or pretended to be done, by the laws of the community. But criminals by whom law is subverted, and who overturn the liberties of mankind, are out of the reach of the ordinary administration of justice. If justice be partially administered in subordinate cases, and the rich man be able to oppress the poor with impunity, it must be admitted that a few examples of this sort are insufficient to authorise the last appeal of human beings. But no man will deny that the case of the usurper and the despot is of the most atrocious nature. In this instance, all the provisions of civil policy being superseded, and justice poisoned at the source, every man is left to execute for himself the decrees of eternal equity.”

Argument in its
vindication

BOOK IV. CHAP.
III.

It may however be doubted whether the destruction of a tyrant be in any respect a case of exception from the rules proper to be observed upon ordinary occasions. The tyrant has certainly no particular sanctity annexed to his person, and may be killed with as little scruple as any other man, when the object is that of repelling immediate violence. In all other cases, the extirpation of the offender by a self-appointed authority, does not appear to be the proper mode of counteracting injustice.

The destruction of a
tyrant not a case of
exception

For, first, either the nation, whose tyrant you would destroy, is ripe for the assertion and maintenance of its liberty, or it is not. If it be, the tyrant ought to be deposed with every appearance of publicity. Nothing can be more improper, than for an affair, interesting to the general weal, to be conducted as if it were an act of darkness and shame. It is an ill lesson we read to mankind, when a proceeding, built upon the broad basis of general justice, is permitted to shrink from public scrutiny. The pistol and the dagger may as easily be made the auxiliaries of vice as

Consequences of
tyrannicide

of virtue. To proscribe all violence, and neglect no means of information and impartiality, is the most effectual security we can have for an issue conformable to the voice of reason and truth.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
III.

If the nation be not ripe for a state of freedom, the man, who assumes to himself the right of interposing violence, may indeed shew the fervour of his conception, and gain a certain degree of notoriety. Fame he will not gain, for mankind at present regard an act of this sort with merited abhorrence; and he will inflict new calamities on his country. The consequences of tyrannicide are well known. If the attempt prove abortive, it renders the tyrant ten times more bloody, ferocious, and cruel than before. If it succeed, and the tyranny be restored, it produces the same effect upon his successors. In the climate of despotism some solitary virtues may spring up. But in the midst of plots and conspiracies there is neither truth, nor confidence, nor love, nor humanity.

Secondly, the true merits of the question will be still farther understood, if we reflect on the nature of assassination. The mistake, which has been incurred upon this subject, is to be imputed principally to the superficial view that has been taken of it. If its advocates had followed the conspirator through all his windings, and observed his perpetual alarm lest truth should become known, they would probably have been less indiscriminate in their applause. No action can be imagined more directly at war with a principle of ingenuousness and candour. Like all that is most odious in the catalogue of vices, it delights in obscurity.

Assassination
described

It shrinks from the penetrating eye of wisdom. It avoids all question, and hesitates and trembles before the questioner. It struggles for a tranquil gaiety, and is only complete where there is the most perfect hypocrisy. It changes the use of speech, and composes every feature the better to deceive. Imagine to yourself the conspirators, kneeling at the feet of Cæsar, as they did the moment before they destroyed him. Not all the virtue of Brutus can save them from your indignation.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
III.

There cannot be a better instance than that of which we are treating, to prove the importance of general sincerity. We see in this example, that an action, which has been undertaken from the best motives, may by a defect in this particular tend to over-turn the very foundations of justice and happiness. Wherever there is assassination, there is an end to all confidence among men. Protests and asseverations go for nothing. No man presumes to know his neighbour's intention. The boundaries, that have hitherto served to divide virtue and vice, are gone. The true interests of mankind require, not their removal, but their confirmation. All morality proceeds upon the assumption of something evident and true, will grow and expand in proportion as these indications are more clear and unequivocal, and could not exist for a moment, if they were destroyed.

Importance of
sincerity

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. IV.

OF THE CULTIVATION OF TRUTH

PERHAPS there cannot be a subject of greater political importance, or better calculated to lead us in safety through the mazes of controversy, than that of the value of truth. Truth may be considered by us, either abstractedly, as it relates to certain general and unchangeable principles, or practically, as it relates to the daily incidents and ordinary commerce of human life. In whichever of these views we consider it, the more deeply we meditate its nature and tendency, the more shall we be struck with its unrivalled importance.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

SECTION I.

OF ABSTRACT OR GENERAL TRUTH

its importance as conducing—to our intellectual improvement—to our moral improvement.—virtue the best source of happiness.—proved by comparison—by its manner of adapting itself to all situationsx2014byitsundecayingexcel excellence—cannot be effectually propagated but by a cultivated mind.—importance of general truth to our political improvement.

ABSTRACTEDLY considered, it conduces to the perfection of our understandings, our virtue and our political institutions.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section I. Its
importance as
conducing

In the discovery and knowledge of truth is comprised all that which an impartial and reflecting mind is accustomed to admire.

It is not possible for us seriously to doubt concerning the preference of a capacious and ardent intelligence over the limited perceptions of a brute. All that we can imagine of angels and Gods consists in superior wisdom. Do you say in power also? It will presently appear that wisdom is power. The truths of

to our intellectual
improvement:

general nature, those truths which preceded, either substantially or in the nature of things, the particular existences that surround us, and are independent of them all, are inexhaustible. Is it

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section I.

possible that a knowledge of these truths, the truths of mathematics, of metaphysics and morals, the truths which, according to Plato's conception^{*}, taught the creator of the world the nature of his materials, the result of his operations, the consequences of all possible systems in all their detail, should not exalt and elevate the mind? The truths of particular nature, the history of man, the characters and propensities of human beings, the process of our own minds, the capacity of our natures, are scarcely less valuable. The reason they are so will best appear if we consider, secondly, the tendency of truth in conducing to the perfection of our virtue.

Virtue cannot exist in an eminent degree, unaccompanied by an extensive survey of causes and their consequences, so that, having struck an accurate balance between the mixed benefits and injuries that for the present adhere to all human affairs, we may adopt that conduct which leads to the greatest possible advantage. If there be such a thing as virtue, it must admit of degrees. If it admit of degrees, he must be most virtuous, who chooses with the soundest judgment the greatest possible good of his species. But, in order to choose the greatest possible good, he must be deeply acquainted with the nature of man, its general

to our moral
improvement

features and its varieties. In order to execute it, he must have considered all the instruments for impressing mind, and the different modes of applying them, and must know exactly the proper moment for bringing them into action. In whatever light we consider virtue,

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section I.

whether we place it in the action or the disposition, its degree must be intimately connected with the degree of knowledge. No man can love virtue sufficiently, who has not an acute and lively perception of its beauty, and its tendency to produce the only solid and permanent happiness. What comparison can be made between the virtue of Socrates and that of a Hottentot or a Siberian? A humorous example how universally this truth has been perceived might be drawn from Tertullian, who, as a father of the church, was obliged to maintain the hollowness and insignificance of pagan virtues, and accordingly assures us, “that the most ignorant peasant under the Christian dispensation possessed more real knowledge than the wisest of the ancient philosophers*.”

We shall be still more fully aware of the connection between virtue and knowledge, if we consider that the highest employment of virtue is to propagate itself. Virtue alone is happiness.

Virtue the best source of happiness:

The happiness of a brute that spends the greater part of his life in listlessness and sleep, is but one remove from the happiness of a plant that is full of sap, vigour and nutrition. The happiness

proved by comparison:

of a man who pursues licentious pleasure is momentary, and his intervals of weariness and disgust perpetual. He speedily wears himself out in his specious career; and, every time that he

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Section I.

employs the means of delight which his corporeal existence affords him, takes so much from his capacity of enjoyment. If he be wise enough like Epicurus to perceive a part of these disadvantages, and to find in fresh herbs and the water of the spring the truest gratification of his appetite, he will be obliged to seek some addition to his stock of enjoyment, and like Epicurus to become benevolent out of pure sensuality. But the virtuous man has a perpetual source of enjoyment. The only reason on account of which the truth of this assertion was ever controverted, is, that men have not understood what it was that constituted virtue.

It is impossible that any situation can occur in which virtue cannot find room to expatiate. In society there is continual opportunity for its active employment. I cannot have intercourse with any human being who may not be the better for that

by its manner of adapting itself to all situations:

intercourse. If he be already just and virtuous, these qualities are improved by communication. It is from a similar principle that it has been observed that great geniuses have usually existed in a cluster, and have been awakened by the fire struck into them by their neighbours. If he be imperfect and erroneous, there must be always some prejudice I may contribute to destroy, some motive to delineate, some error to remove. If I be prejudiced and imperfect myself, it cannot however happen

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Section I.

that my prejudices and imperfections shall be exactly coincident with his. I may therefore inform him of the truths that I know, and even by the collision of prejudices truth is elicited. It is impossible that I should strenuously apply myself to his mind with sincere motives of benevolence without some good being the result. Nor am I more at a loss in solitude. In solitude I may accumulate the materials of social benefit. No situation can be so desperate as to preclude these efforts. Voltaire, when shut up in the Bastille, and for

ought he knew for life, deprived of books, of pens and of paper, arranged and in part executed the project of his *Henriade*.*

Another advantage of virtue in this personal view, is that, while sensual pleasure exhausts the frame, and passions often excited become frigid and callous, virtue has exactly the opposite propensities. Passions, in the usual acceptation of that term, having no absolute foundation in the nature of things, delight only by their novelty. But the more we are acquainted with virtue, the more estimable will it appear; and its field is as endless as the progress of mind. If an enlightened love of it be once excited in the mind, it is impossible that it should not continually increase. By its variety, by its activity it perpetually renovates itself, and renders the intellect in which it resides ever new and ever young.

by its undecaying excellence:

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Section I.

All these reasonings are calculated to persuade us that the most precious boon we can bestow upon others is virtue, that the highest employment of virtue is to propagate itself. But, as virtue is inseparably connected with knowledge in my own mind, so can it only by knowledge be communicated to others. How can the virtue we have just been contemplating be created, but by infusing comprehensive views and communicating energetic truths? Now that man alone is qualified to give these views, and communicate these truths, who is himself pervaded with them.

cannot be effectually propagated but by a cultivated mind

Let us suppose for a moment virtuous dispositions as existing without knowledge or outrunning knowledge, the last of which is certainly possible, and we shall presently find how little such virtue is worthy to be propagated. The most generous views will in such cases frequently lead to the most nefarious actions. A Calvin will burn Servetus, and a Digby generate the gunpowder treason. But, to leave these extreme instances, in all cases where mistaken virtue leads to cruel and tyrannical actions, the mind will be soured and made putrescent by the actions it perpetrates. Truth, immortal and ever present truth, is so powerful, that, in spite of all his inveterate prejudices, the upright man will suspect himself, when he resolves upon an action that is at war with the plainest principles of morality.

He will become melancholy, dissatisfied and anxious. His firmness will degenerate into obstinacy, and his justice into inexorable severity. The farther he pursues his system, the more erroneous will he become. The farther he pursues it, the less will he be satisfied with it. As truth is an endless source of tranquillity and delight, error will be a prolific fountain of new mistakes and new discontent.

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Section I.

As to the third point, the tendency of truth to the improvement of our political institutions, this is in reality the subject of the present volume, and has been particularly argued in some of the earlier divisions of the work. If politics be a science, the investigation of truth must be the means of unfolding it. If men resemble each other in more numerous and essential particulars than those in which they differ, if the best purposes that can be accomplished respecting them be to make

Importance of general truth to our political improvement

them free and virtuous and wise, there must be one best method of advancing these common purposes, one best mode of social existence deducible from the principles of their nature. If truth be one, there must be one code of truths on the subject of our reciprocal duties. Nor is the investigation of truth only the best mode of arriving at the object of all political institutions, but it is also the best mode of introducing and establishing it. Discussion is the path that leads to discovery and demonstration. Motives ferment in the minds of great bodies of men till all is ripe for action. The more familiar the mind becomes with the ideas of which they consist and the propositions that express them, the more fully is it pervaded with their urgency and importance.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section I.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

SECTION II.

OF SINCERITY

nature of this virtue.—its effects—upon our own actions—upon our neighbours.—its tendency to produce fortitude.—effects of insincerity.—character which sincerity would acquire to him who practised it.—objections.—the fear of giving unnecessary pain.—answer.—the desire of preserving my life.—this objection proves too much.—answer.—secrecy considered.—the secrets of others.—state secrets.—secrets of philanthropy.

IT is evident in the last place, that a strict adherence to truth will have the best effect upon our minds in the ordinary commerce of life. This is the virtue which has commonly been known by the denomination of sincerity; and, whatever certain accommodating moralists may teach us, the value of sincerity

Section II. Nature of this virtue

will be in the highest degree obscured, when it is not complete. Real sincerity deposes me from all authority over the statement of facts. Similar to the duty which Tully imposes upon the historian, it compels me not to dare “to utter what is false, or conceal what is true.” It annihilates the bastard prudence, which would instruct me to give language to no sentiment that may be prejudicial to my interests. It extirpates the low and selfish principle, which would induce me to utter nothing “to the disadvantage of him from whom I have received no injury.” It compels, me to regard the concerns of my species as my own concerns. What I know of truth, of morals, of religion, of government, it compels me to communicate. All the praise which a virtuous man and an honest action can merit, I am obliged to pay to the uttermost mite. I am obliged to give language to all the blame to which profligacy, venality, hypocrisy and circumvention are so justly entitled. I am not empowered to conceal any thing I know of myself, whether it tend to my honour or to my disgrace. I am obliged to treat every other man with equal frankness, without dreading the imputation of flattery on the one hand, without dreading his resentment and enmity on the other.

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Section II.

Did every man impose this law upon himself, he would be obliged to consider before he decided upon the commission of an equivocal action, whether he chose to be his own historian, to be the future narrator of the scene in which he was engaging. It has been justly observed that the popish practice of auricular confession has been attended with some salutary effects. How much better would it be, if, instead of a practice thus ambiguous, and which may be converted into so dangerous an engine of ecclesiastical despotism, every man would make the world his confessional, and the human species the keeper of his conscience?

Its effects upon our own actions:

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Section II.

upon our neighbours

How extensive an effect would be produced, if every man were sure of meeting in his neighbour the ingenuous censor, who would tell to himself, and publish to the world, his virtues, his good deeds, his meannesses and his follies? I have no right to reject any duty, because it is equally incumbent upon my neighbours, and they do not practise it. When I have discharged the whole of my duty, it is weakness and vice to make myself unhappy about the omissions of others. Nor is it possible to say how much good one man sufficiently rigid in his adherence to truth would effect. One such man, with genius, information and energy, might redeem a nation from vice.

The consequence to myself of telling every man the truth, regardless of personal danger or of injury to my interests in the world, would be uncommonly favourable. I should acquire a fortitude that would render me equal to the most trying situations, that would maintain my presence of mind entire in spite of unexpected occurrences, that would furnish me with extemporatory

Its tendency to produce fortitude

arguments and wisdom, and endue my tongue with irresistible eloquence. Animated by the love of truth, my understanding would always be vigorous and alert, not as before frequently subject to listlessness, timidity and insipidity. Animated by the love of truth, and by a passion inseparable from its nature, and which is almost the same thing under another name, the love of my species, I should carefully seek for such topics as might most conduce to the benefit of my neighbours, anxiously watch the progress of mind, and incessantly labour for the extirpation of prejudice.

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Section II.

What is it that at this day enables a thousand errors to keep their station in the world, priestcraft, tests, bribery, war, cabal, and whatever else is the contempt and abhorrence of the enlightened and honest mind? Cowardice. Because, while vice walks erect with an unabashed countenance, men less vicious dare not paint her with that truth of colouring, which should at once confirm the innocent and reform the guilty. Because the majority of those who are not involved in the busy scene, and who, possessing some discernment, see that things are not altogether right, yet see in so frigid a way, and with so imperfect a view. Many, who detect the imposture, are yet absurd enough to imagine that imposture is necessary to keep the world in awe, and that truth being too weak to curb the turbulent passions of mankind, it is exceedingly proper to call in knavery and artifice as the abettors of her power. If every man to-day would tell all the truth he knows, three years hence there would be scarcely a falshood of any magnitude remaining in the civilised world.

Effects of insincerity

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Section II.

There is no fear that the character here described should degenerate into ruggedness and brutality*. The motive by which it is animated affords a sufficient security against such consequences. "I tell an unpleasant truth to my neighbour from a conviction that it is my duty. I am convinced it is my duty, because I perceive the communication is calculated for his benefit." His benefit therefore is the motive of my proceeding, and with such a motive it is impossible I should not seek to communicate it in the most efficacious form, not rousing his

Character which sincerity would acquire to him who practised it

resentment, but awakening his moral feelings and his energy. Meanwhile the happiest of all qualifications in order to render truth palatable, is that which rises spontaneously in the situation we have been considering. Truth according to the terms of the supposition is to be spoken from the love of truth. But the face, the voice, the gesture are so many indexes to the mind. It is scarcely possible therefore that the person with whom I am conversing should not perceive, that I am influenced by no malignity, acrimony and envy. In proportion as my motive is pure, at least after a few experiments, my manner will become unembarrassed. There will be frankness in my voice, fervour in my gesture, and kindness in my heart. That man's mind must be of a very perverse texture, that can convert a beneficent potion administered with no ungenerous retrospect, no selfish triumph, into rancour and aversion. There is an energy in the sincerity of a virtuous mind that nothing human can resist.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section II.

I stop not to consider the objections of the man who is immersed in worldly prospects and pursuits. He that does not know that virtue is better than riches or title must be convinced by arguments foreign to this place.

Objections

But it will be asked, "What then, are painful truths to be disclosed to persons who are already in the most pitiable circumstances? Ought a woman that is dying of a fever to be informed of the fate of her husband whose skull has been fractured by a fall from his horse?"

The fear of giving
unnecessary pain

The most that could possibly be conceded to a case like this, is, that this perhaps is not the moment to begin to treat like a rational being a person who has through the course of a long life been treated like an infant. But in reality there is a mode in which under such circumstances truth may safely be communicated; and, if it be not thus done, there is perpetual danger that it may be done in a blunter way by the heedless loquaciousness of a chambermaid, or the yet undebauched sincerity of an infant. How many arts of hypocrisy, stratagem and falshood must be employed to cover this pitiful secret? Truth was calculated in

Answer

the nature of things to discipline the mind to fortitude, humanity and virtue. Who are we, that we should subvert the nature of things and the system of the universe, that we should breed up a set of summer insects, upon which the breeze of sincerity may never blow, and the tempest of misfortune never beat?

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section II.

"But truth may sometimes be fatal to him that speaks it. A man, who fought for the Pretender in the year 1745, when the event happened that dispersed his companions, betook himself to solitary flight. He fell in with a party of loyalists who were seeking to apprehend him; but not knowing his person, they enquired of him for intelligence to guide them in their pursuit. He returned an answer calculated to cherish them in their mistake, and saved his life."

The desire of
preserving my life

This like the former is an extreme case; but the true answer will probably be found to be the same. If any one should question this, let him consider how far his approbation of the conduct of the person above cited would lead him. The rebels, as they were called, were treated in the period from which the example is drawn with the most illiberal injustice. This man, guided perhaps by the most magnanimous motives in what he had done, would have been put to an ignominious death. But, if he had a right to extricate himself by falshood, why not the wretch who has been guilty of forgery, who has deserved punishment, but who may now be conscious that he has in him materials and inclination to make a valuable member of society?

This objection proves too much

Nor is the inclination an essential part of the supposition. Wherever the materials exist, it will perhaps be found to be flagrantly unjust on the part of society to destroy them, instead of discovering the means by which they might be rendered innocent and useful. At this rate, a man has nothing to do but to commit one crime, in order to give him a right to commit a second which shall secure impunity to the first.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section II.

But why, when so many hundred individuals have been contented to become martyrs to the unintelligible principles of a pitiful sect, should not the one innocent man I have been describing be

Answer

contented to offer himself up a victim at the shrine of veracity? Why should he purchase a few poor years of exile and misery by the commission of falshood? Had he surrendered himself to his pursuers, had he declared in the presence of his judges and his country, "I, whom you think too wicked and degenerate to deserve even to live, have chosen rather to encounter your injustice than be guilty of an untruth: I would have escaped from your iniquity and tyranny if I had been able; but, hedged in on all sides, having no means of deliverance but in falshood, I cheerfully submit to all that your malice can inflict rather than violate the majesty of truth:" would he not have done an honour to himself, and afforded an example to the world, that would have fully compensated the calamity of his untimely death? It is in all cases incumbent upon us to dis

charge our own duty, without being influenced by the enquiry whether other men will discharge or neglect theirs.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section II.

It must be remembered however that this is not the true jet of the argument. The stress does not lie upon the good he would have done: that is precarious. This heroic action, as it is to be feared has been the case with many others, might be consigned to oblivion. The object of true wisdom under the circumstances we are considering, is to weigh, not so much what is to be done, as what is to be avoided. We must not be guilty of insincerity. We must not seek to obtain a desirable object by vile means. We must prefer a general principle to the meretricious attractions of a particular deviation. We must perceive in the preservation of that general principle a balance of universal good, outweighing the benefit to arise in any instance from superseding it. It is by general principles that the business of the universe is carried on. If the laws of gravity and impulse did not make us know the consequences of our actions, we should be incapable of judgment and inference. Nor is this less true in morals. He that, having laid down to himself a plan of sincerity, is guilty of a single deviation, infects the whole, contaminates the frankness and magnanimity of his temper (for fortitude in the

intrepidity of lying is baseness), and is less virtuous than the foe against whom he defends himself; for it is more virtuous in my neighbour to confide in my apparent honesty, than in me to abuse his confidence. In the case of man's tyranny there are two things to be considered. It is an evil not wantonly to be incurred, for we know not what good yet remains for us to do. It is an evil not to be avoided at the expence of principle, for we should be upon our guard against setting an inordinate value upon our own efforts, and imagining that truth would die, if we were to be destroyed.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section II.

“But what becomes of the great duty of secrecy, which the incomparable Fenelon has made a capital branch in the education of his Telemachus?” It is annihilated. It becomes a truly virtuous man not to engage in any action of which he would be ashamed though all the world were spectator. Indeed Fenelon with all his ability has fallen into the most palpable inconsistency upon this subject. In Ithaca a considerable part of the merit of Telemachus consists in keeping his mother's secrets*. When he arrives in Tyre, he will not be persuaded to commit or suffer a deception, though his life was apparently at stake†.

Secrecy considered

What is it of which an honest man is commonly ashamed? Of virtuous poverty, of doing menial offices for himself, of having raised himself by merit from a humble situation, and of a thousand particulars which in reality constitute his glory. With respect to actions of beneficence we cannot be too much upon our guard against a spirit of ostentation and the character that imperiously exacts the gratitude of its beneficiaries; but it is certainly an extreme weakness to desire to hide our deserts. So far from desiring to withhold from the world the knowledge of our good deeds, we ought to be forward to exhibit an attractive and illustrious example. We cannot determine to keep any thing secret without risking at the same time to commit a hundred artifices, quibbles, equivocations and falsehoods.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section II.

But the secrets of others, “have I a power over them?” Probably not: but you have a duty respecting them. The facts with which you are acquainted are a part of your possessions, and you are as much obliged respecting them as in any other case, to employ them for the public good. Have I no right to indulge in myself the caprice of concealing any of my affairs, and can another man have a right by his caprice to hedge up and restrain the path of my duty?—“But state secrets?” This perhaps is a subject that ought not to be anticipated. We shall have occasion to enquire how ministers of the concerns of a nation came by their right to equivocate, to juggle and over-reach, while private men are obliged to be ingenuous, direct and sincere.

The secrets of others.

State secrets

There is one case of a singular nature that seems to deserve a separate examination; the case of secrets that are to be kept for the sake of mankind. Full justice is done to the affirmative side of this argument by Mr. Condorcet in his Life of Voltaire, where he is justifying this

Secrets of
philanthropy

illustrious friend of mankind, for his gentleness and forbearance in asserting the liberties of the species. He first enumerates the incessant attacks of Voltaire upon superstition,

hypocritical austerities and war; and then proceeds: “It is true, the more men are enlightened, the more they will be free; but let us not put despots on their guard, and incite them to form a

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section II.

league against the progress of reason. Let us conceal from them the strict and eternal union that subsists between knowledge and liberty. Voltaire thought proper to paint superstition as the enemy of monarchy, to put kings and princes upon their guard against the gloomy ferocity and ambition of the priesthood, and to demonstrate that, were it not for the freedom of thought and investigation, there would be no security against the return of papal insolence, of proscriptions, assassinations and religious war. Had he taken the other side of the question, had he maintained, which is equally true, that superstition and ignorance are the support of despotism, he would only have anticipated truths for which the public were not ripe, and have seen a speedy end to his career. Truth taught by moderate degrees gradually enlarges the intellectual capacity, and insensibly prepares the equality and happiness of mankind; but taught without prudential restraint would either be nipped in the bud, or occasion national concussions in the world, that would be found premature and therefore abortive*.”

What a cowardly distrust do reasonings like these exhibit of the omnipotence of truth! With respect to personal safety, it will be found upon an accurate examination that Voltaire with all his

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section II.

ingenuity and stratagem was for sixty years together the object of perpetual, almost daily persecution from courts and ministers*. He was obliged to retire from country to country, and at last to take advantage of a residence upon the borders of two states with a habitation in each. His attempts to secure the patronage of princes led only to vicissitude and disgrace. If his plan had been more firm and direct, he would not have been less safe. Timidity, and an anxious endeavour to secure to ourselves a protector, invite persecution. With the advantages of Voltaire, with his talents and independence, he might have held the tyrants of the world in awe.

As to the progress of truth, it is not so precarious as its fearful friends may imagine. Mr. Condorcet has justly insinuated in the course of his argument, that “in the invention of printing is contained the embryo, which in its maturity and vigour is

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section II.

destined to annihilate the slavery of the human race*.” Books, if proper precautions be employed, cannot be destroyed. Knowledge cannot be extirpated. Its progress is silent, but infallible; and he is the most useful soldier in this war, who accumulates in an unperishable form the greatest mass of truth.

As truth has nothing to fear from her enemies, she needs not have any thing to fear from her friends. The man, who publishes the sublimest discoveries, is not of all others the most likely to inflame the vulgar, and hurry the great question of human happiness to a premature crisis. The object to be pursued undoubtedly is, the gradual improvement of mind. But this end will be better answered by exhibiting as much truth as possible, enlightening a few, and suffering knowledge to expand in the proportion which the laws of nature and necessity prescribe, than by any artificial plan

of piecemeal communication that we can invent. There is in the nature of things a gradation in discovery and a progress in improvement, which do not need to be assisted by the stratagems of their votaries. In a word, there cannot be a more unworthy idea, than that truth and virtue should be under the necessity of seeking alliance with concealment. The man, who would artfully draw me into a little, that by so doing he may unawares surprise me into much, I infallibly regard as an impostor. Will truth, contracted into some petty sphere and shorn of its beams, acquire additional evidence? Rather let me trust to its omnipotence, to its congeniality with the nature of intellect, to its direct and irresistible tendency to produce liberty, and happiness, and virtue. Let me fear that I have not enough of it, that my views are too narrow to produce impression, and anxiously endeavour to add to my stock; not apprehend that, exhibited in its noon-day brightness, its lustre and genial nature should not be universally confessed* .

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Section II.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

APPENDIX, No. I. P. 233.

OF THE CONNEXION BETWEEN UNDERSTANDING AND VIRTUE

can eminent virtue exist unconnected with talents?—nature of virtue—it is the offspring. of understanding.—it generates understanding.—illustration from other pursuits—love—ambition—appliedd.

can eminent talents exist unconnected with virtue?—argument in the affirmative from analogy—in the negative from the universality of moral speculation—from the nature of vice as founded in mistake.—the argument balanced—importance of a sense of justice.—its connexion with talents.—illiberality with which men of talents are usually treated.

APROPOSITION which, however evident in itself, seems never to have been considered with the attention it deserves, is that which affirms the connexion between understanding and virtue. Can an honest ploughman be as virtuous as Cato? Is a man of weak intellects and narrow education as capable of moral excellence as the sublimest genius or the mind most stored with information and science?

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Appendix, No. I. Can eminent virtue exist unconnected with talents?

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Appendix, No. I.

Nature of virtue

To determine these questions it is necessary we should recollect the nature of virtue. Considered as a personal quality it consists in the disposition of the mind, and may be defined a desire to promote the benefit of intelligent beings in general, the quantity of virtue being as the quantity of desire. Now desire is another name for preference, or a perception of the excellence real or supposed of any object. I say real or supposed, for an object totally destitute of real and intrinsic excellence, may become an object of desire by means of the imaginary excellence that is ascribed to it. Nor is this the only mistake to which human intelligences are liable. We may desire an object of absolute excellence, not for its real and genuine recommendations, but for some fictitious attractions we may impute to it. This is always in some degree the case, when a beneficial action is performed from an ill motive.

How far is this mistake compatible with real virtue? If I desire the benefit of intelligent beings, not from a clear and distinct perception of what it is in which their benefit consists, but from the unexamined lessons of education, from the physical effect of sympathy, or from any species of zeal unallied to and incommensurate with knowledge, can this desire be admitted for vir tuous? Nothing seems more inconsistent with our ideas of virtue.

A virtuous preference is the preference of an object for the sake of certain beneficial qualities which really belong to that object. To attribute virtue to any other species of preference would be

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Appendix, No. I.

the same as to suppose that an accidental effect of my conduct, which was altogether out of my view at the time of adopting it, might entitle me to the appellation of virtuous.

Hence it appears, first, that virtue consists in a desire of the benefit of the species: and, secondly, that that desire only can be denominated virtuous, which flows from a distinct perception of the value, and consequently of the nature, of the thing desired.

It is the offspring of understanding

But how extensive must be the capacity that comprehends the full value of that benefit which is the object of virtue! It must begin with a collective idea of the human species. It must discriminate, among all the different causes that produce a pleasurable state of mind, that which produces the most exquisite and durable pleasure. Eminent virtue requires that I should have a grand view of the tendency of knowledge to produce happiness, and of just political institution to favour the progress of knowledge. It demands that I should perceive in what manner social intercourse may be made conducive to virtue and felicity, and imagine the unspeakable advantages that may arise from a coincidence and succession of generous efforts. These things are necessary, not merely for the purpose of enabling me to employ my virtuous disposition in the best manner, but also

for the purpose of giving to that disposition a just animation and vigour. God, according to the ideas usually conceived of that being, is more benevolent than man, because he has a constant and clear perception of the nature of that end which his providence pursues.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. I.

A farther proof that a powerful understanding is inseparable from eminent virtue will suggest itself, if we recollect that earnest desire never fails to generate capacity.

It generates understanding

This proposition has been beautifully illustrated by the poets, when they have represented the passion of love as immediately leading in the breast of the lover to the attainment of many arduous accomplishments. It unlocks his tongue, and enables him to plead the cause of his passion with insinuating eloquence. It renders his conversation pleasing and his manners graceful. Does he desire to express his feelings in the language of verse? It dictates to him the most natural and pathetic strains, and supplies him with a just and interesting language which the man of mere reflection and science has often fought for in vain.

Illustration from other pursuits:

love:

No picture can be more truly founded in a knowledge of human nature than this. The history of all eminent talents is of a similar kind. Did Themistocles desire to eclipse the trophies of the battle of Marathon? The uneasiness of this desire would not let him sleep, and all his thoughts were occupied with the invention of means to accomplish the purpose he had chosen. It

ambition:

is a well known maxim in the forming of juvenile minds, that the instruction, which is communicated by mere constraint, makes a slow and feeble impression; but that, when once you have

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. I.

inspired the mind with a love for its object, the scene and the progress are entirely altered. The uneasiness of mind which earnest desire produces, doubles our

intellectual activity; and as surely carries us forward with increased velocity towards our goal, as the expectation of a reward of ten thousand pounds would prompt me to walk from London to York with firmer resolution and in a shorter time.

Let the object be for a person uninstructed in the rudiments of drawing to make a copy of some celebrated statue. At first, we will suppose, his attempt shall be mean and unsuccessful. If his desire be feeble, he will be deterred by the miscarriage of this essay. If his desire be ardent and invincible, he will return to the attack. He will derive instruction from his failure. He will examine where and why he miscarried. He will study his model with a more curious eye. He will perceive that he failed principally from the loose and undigested idea he had formed of the object before him. It will no longer stand in his mind as one general mass, but he will analyse it, bestowing upon each part in succession a separate consideration.

The case is similar in virtue as in science. If I have conceived

an earnest desire of being a benefactor of my species, I shall no doubt find out a channel in which for my desire to operate, and shall be quick-sighted in discovering the defects or comparative littleness of the plan I have chosen. But the choice of an

excellent plan for the accomplishment of an important purpose, and the exertion of a mind perpetually watchful to remove its defects, imply considerable understanding.

The farther I am engaged in the pursuit of this plan the more will my capacity increase. If my mind flag and be discouraged in the pursuit, it will not be merely want of understanding, but want of desire. My desire and my virtue will be less, than those of the man, who goes on with unremitted constancy in the same career.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. I.

applied

Thus far we have only been considering how impossible it is that eminent virtue should exist in a weak understanding, and it is surprising that such a proposition should ever have been contested. It is a curious question to examine, how far the converse of this proposition is true, and in what degree eminent talents are compatible with the absence of virtue.

Can eminent talents exist unconnected with virtue?

From the arguments already adduced it appears that virtuous desire is another name for a clear and distinct perception of the nature and value of the object of virtue. Hence it seems most natural to conclude, that, though understanding, or strong percipient power is the indispensable prerequisite of virtue, yet it is necessary that this power should be fixed upon this object, in

order to its producing the desired effect. Thus it is in art. Without genius no man ever was a poet; but it is necessary that general capacity should have been directed to this particular channel, for poetical excellence to be the result.

Argument in the affirmative from analogy:

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. I.

There is however some difference between the two cases.

Poetry is the business of a few, virtue and vice are the affairs of all men. To every intellect that exists one or other of these qualities must properly belong. It must be granted that, where every other circumstance is equal, that man will be most virtuous, whose understanding has been most actively employed in the study of virtue. But morality has been in a certain degree an object of attention to all men. No person ever failed more or less to apply the standard of just and unjust to his own actions and those of others; and this has of course been generally done with most ingenuity by men of the greatest capacity.

in the negative from the universality of moral speculation:

It must farther be remembered that a vicious conduct is always the result of narrow views. A man of powerful capacity and extensive observation is least likely to commit the mistake, either of seeing himself as the only object of importance in the universe, or of conceiving that his own advantage may best be promoted by trampling on that of others. Liberal accomplishments are surely in some degree connected with liberal principles. He, who takes into his view a whole nation as the subjects of his operation or the instruments of his greatness, may naturally be expected to entertain some kindness for the whole. He, whose mind is habitually elevated to magnificent conceptions, is not likely to sink without strong reluctance into those sordid pursuits, which engross so large a portion of mankind.

from the nature of vice as founded in mistake

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Appendix, No. I.

But, though these general maxims must be admitted for true, and would incline us to hope for a constant union between eminent talents and great virtues, there are other considerations which present a strong drawback upon so agreeable an expectation. It is sufficiently evident that morality in some degree enters into the reflections of all mankind. But it is equally evident, that it may enter for more or for less; and that there will be men of the highest talents, who have their attention diverted to other objects, and by whom it will be meditated upon with less earnestness, than it may sometimes be by other men who are in a general view their inferiors. The human mind is in some cases so tenacious of its errors, and so ingenious in the invention of a sophistry by which they may be vindicated, as to frustrate expectations of virtue in other respects the best founded.

The argument balanced

From the whole of the subject it seems to appear, that men of talents, even when they are erroneous, are not destitute of virtue, and that there is a degree of guilt of which they are incapable. There is no ingredient that so essentially contributes to a virtuous character as a sense of justice. Philanthropy, as contradistinguished to justice, is rather an unreflecting feeling, than a rational principle. It leads to an absurd indulgence, which is frequently more injurious than beneficial even to the individual it proposes to favour. It leads to a blind partiality, inflicting calamity without remorse upon many perhaps, in order to promote the imagined interest of a few. But justice measures by one inflexible standard the claims

Importance of a sense of justice

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Appendix, No. I.

of all, weighs their opposite pretensions, and seeks to diffuse happiness, because happiness is the fit and reasonable adjunct of a conscious being. Wherever therefore a strong sense of justice exists, it is common and reasonable to say, that in that mind exists considerable virtue, though the individual from an unfortunate concurrence of circumstances may with all his great qualities be the instrument of a very small portion of benefit. Can great intellectual energy exist without a strong sense of justice?

It has no doubt resulted from a train of speculation similar to this, that poetical readers have commonly remarked Milton's devil to be a being of considerable virtue. It must be admitted that his energies centered too much in personal regards. But why did he rebel against his maker? It was, as he himself informs us, because he saw no sufficient reason for that extreme inequality of rank and power which the creator assumed. It was because prescription and precedent form no adequate ground for implicit faith. After his fall, why did he still cherish the spirit of opposition? From a persuasion that he was hardly and

Its connexion with talents

injuriously treated. He was not discouraged by the apparent inequality of the contest: because a sense of reason and justice was stronger in his mind, than a sense of brute force: because he had much of the feelings of an Epictetus or a Cato, and little of those of a slave. He bore his torments with fortitude, because he disdained to be subdued by despotic power. He sought revenge, because he could not think with tameness of the unexpostulating authority that assumed to dispose of him. How beneficial and illustrious might the temper from which these qualities flowed have proved with a small diversity of situation!

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. I.

Let us descend from these imaginary existences to real history. We shall find that even Cæsar and Alexander had their virtues. There is great reason to believe, that, however mistaken was their system of conduct, they imagined it reconcilable and even conducive to the general good. If they had desired the general good more earnestly, they would have understood better how to promote it.

Upon the whole it appears, that great talents are great energies, and that great energies cannot flow but from a powerful sense of fitness and justice. A man of uncommon genius is a man of high passions and lofty design; and our passions will be found in the last analysis to have their surest foundation in a sentiment of justice. If a man be of an aspiring and ambitious temper, it is because at present he finds himself out of his place, and wishes to be in it. Even the lover imagines that his qualities or his passion give him a title superior to that of other men. If I accumulate wealth, it is because I think that the most rational plan of life cannot be secured without it; and, if I dedicate my energies to sensual pleasures, it is that I regard other pursuits as irrational and visionary. All our passions would die in the moment they were conceived, were it not for this reinforcement. A man of quick resentment, of strong feelings, and who pertinaciously resists every thing that he regards as an unjust assumption, may be considered as having in him the seeds of eminence. Nor is it easily to be conceived that such a man should not proceed from a sense of justice to some degree of

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. I.

benevolence; as Milton's hero felt real compassion and sympathy for his partners in misfortune.

If these reasonings are to be admitted, what judgment shall we form of the decision of doctor Johnson, who, speaking of a certain obscure translator of the odes of Pindar, says, that he was “one of the few poets to whom death needed not to be terrible*?” Let it be remembered that the error is by no means peculiar to doctor Johnson, though there are few instances in which it is carried to a more violent extreme, than in the general tenour of the work from which this quotation is taken. It was natural to expect that there would be a combination among the multitude to pull down intellectual eminence. Ambition is common to all men; and those, who are unable to rise to distinction, are at least willing to reduce others to their own standard. No man can completely understand the character of him with whom he has no sympathy of views, and we may be allowed to revile what we do not understand. But it is deeply to be regretted that men of talents should so often have entered into this combination. Who does not recollect with pain the vulgar abuse that Swift has thrown upon Dryden, and the mutual jealousies and animosities of Rousseau and Voltaire, men who ought to have co-operated for the salvation of the world?.

Illiberality with which men of talents are usually treated

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Appendix, No. I.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

APPENDIX, No. II, P. 242.

OF THE MODE OF EXCLUDING VISITORS

its impropriety argued—from the situation in which it places, 1. the visitor—2. the servant.—objections:—pretended necessity of this practice, 1. to preserve us from intrusion—2. to free us from disagreeable acquaintance.—characters of the honest and dishonest man in this respect compared.

THIS principle respecting the observation of truth in the common intercourses of life cannot perhaps be better illustrated, than from the familiar and trivial case, as it is commonly supposed to be, of a master directing his servant to say he is not at home, as a means of freeing him from the intrusion of impertinent guests. No question of morality can be foreign to the science of politics; nor will those few pages of the present work be found perhaps the least valuable, which here and in other places* are dedicated to the refutation of errors, that by their extensive influence have perverted the foundation of moral and political justice.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. II.
Its impropriety
argued:

Let us first, according to the well known axiom of morality, put ourselves in the place of the person whom this answer excludes. It seldom happens but that he is able, if he be in possession of any discernment, to discover with tolerable accuracy whether the answer he receives be true or false. There are a thousand petty circumstances by which falshood continually detects itself. The countenance and the voice of the servant, unless long practised indeed in this lesson of deceit, his cold and reserved manner in the one case, and his free, ingenuous and unembarrassed air in the other, will almost always speak a language less ambiguous than his lips. But let us suppose only that we vehemently suspect the truth. It is not intended to keep us in ignorance of the existence of such a practice. He that adopts it, is willing to avow in general terms that such is his system, or he makes out a case for himself much less favourable than I was making out for him. The visitor then who receives this answer, feels in spite of himself a contempt for the prevarication of the person he visits. I appeal to the feelings of every man in the situation described, and I have no doubt that he will find this to be their true state in the first instance, however he may have a set of sophistical reasonings at hand by which he may in a few minutes reason down the first movements of indignation. He feels that the trouble he has taken and the civility he intended intitled him at least to truth in return.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. II.
from the situation in
which it places, 1. the
visitor:

Having put ourselves in the place of the visitor, let us next put ourselves in the place of the poor despised servant. Let us suppose that we are ourselves destined as sons or husbands to give this answer that our father or our wife is not at home, when he or she is really in the house. Should we not feel our tongues

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. II.
2. the servant

contaminated with the base plebeian lie? Would it be a sufficient opiate to our consciences to say that “such is the practice, and it is well understood?” It never can be understood: its very intention is, not to be understood. We say that “we have certain arguments that prove the practice to be innocent.” Are servants only competent to understand these arguments? Surely we ought best to be able to understand our own arguments, and yet we shrink with abhorrence from the idea of personally acting upon them.

Whatever sophistry we may have to excuse our error, nothing is more certain than that our servants understand the lesson we teach them to be a lie. It is accompanied by all the retinue of falshood. Before it can be gracefully practised, the servant must be no mean proficient in the mysteries of hypocrisy. By the easy impudence with which it is uttered, he best answers the purpose of his master, or in other words the purpose of deceit. By the easy impudence with which it is uttered, he best stifles the upbraidings of his own mind, and conceals from others the shame imposed on him by his despotic task-master. Before this can be sufficiently done, he must have discarded the ingenuous

frankness by means of which the thoughts find easy commerce with the tongue, and the clear and undisguised countenance which ought to be the faithful mirror of the mind. Do you think, when he has learned this degenerate lesson in one instance, that it will produce no unfavourable effects upon his general conduct? Surely, if we will practise vice, we ought at least to have the magnanimity to practise it in person, not cowardlike corrupt the principles of another, and oblige him to do that which we have not the honesty to dare to do for ourselves.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. II.

But it is said, “that this lie is necessary, and that the intercourse of human society cannot be carried on without it.” What, is it not as easy to say, “I am engaged,” or “indisposed,” or as the case may happen, as “I am not at home?” Are these answers more insulting, than the universally suspected answer, the notorious hypocrisy of “I am not at home?”

Objections:

Pretended necessity of this practice, 1. to preserve us from intrusion:

The purpose indeed for which this answer is usually employed is a deceit of another kind. Every man has in the catalogue of his acquaintance some that he particularly loves, and others to whom he is indifferent, or perhaps worse than indifferent. This answer leaves the latter to suppose, if they please, that they are in the class of the former. And what is the benefit to result from this indiscriminate, undistinguishing manner of treating our neighbours? Whatever benefit it be, it no doubt exists in considerable vigour in the present state of polished society,

where forms perpetually intrude to cut off all intercourse between the feelings of mankind; and I can scarcely tell a man on the one hand “that I esteem his character and honour his virtues,” or on the other “that he is fallen into an error which will be of prejudicial consequence to him,” without trampling upon all the barriers of politeness. But is all this right? Is not the esteem or the disapprobation of others among the most powerful incentives to virtue or punishments of vice? Can we even understand virtue and vice half so well as we otherwise should, if we be unacquainted with the feelings of our neighbours

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. II.

respecting them? If there be in the list of our acquaintance any person whom we particularly dislike, it usually happens that it is for some moral fault that we perceive or think we perceive in him. Why should he be kept in ignorance of our opinion respecting him, and prevented from the opportunity either of amendment or vindication? If he be too wise or too foolish, too virtuous or too vicious for us, why should he not be ingenuously told of his mistake in his intended kindness to us, rather than be suffered to find it out by six months enquiry from our servants?

This leads us to yet one more argument in favour of this disingenuous

practice. We are told, "there is no other by which we can rid ourselves of disagreeable acquaintance." How long shall this be one of the effects of polished society, to persuade us that we are incapable of doing the most trivial offices for ourselves? You may as well tell me, "that it is a matter of indispensable necessity to have a valet to put on my stockings."

2. to free us from disagreeable acquaintance

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Appendix, No. II.

In reality the existence of these troublesome visitors is owing to the hypocrisy of politeness. It is that we wear the same indiscriminate smile, the same appearance of cordiality and complacency to all our acquaintance. Ought we to do thus? Are virtue and excellence entitled to no distinctions? For the trouble of these impertinent visits we may thank ourselves. If we practised no deceit, if we assumed no atom of cordiality and esteem we did not feel, we should be little pestered with these buzzing intruders. But one species of falshood involves us in another; and he, that pleads for these lying answers to our visitors, in reality pleads the cause of a cowardice, that dares not deny to vice the distinction and kindness that are exclusively due to virtue.

The man who acted upon this system would be very far removed from a Cynic. The conduct of men formed upon the fashionable system is a perpetual contradiction. At one moment they fawn upon us with a servility that dishonours the dignity of man, and at another treat us with a neglect, a sarcastic insolence, and a supercilious disdain, that are felt as the severest cruelty, by him who has not the firmness to regard them with neglect. The conduct of the genuine moralist is equable and uniform. He loves all mankind, he desires the benefit of all, and this love and this desire are legible in his conduct. Does he remind us of our faults? It is with no mixture of asperity,

Characters of the honest and dishonest man in this respect compared

of selfish disdain and insolent superiority. Of consequence it is scarcely possible he should wound. Few indeed are those effeminate valetudinarians, who recoil from the advice, when they distinguish the motive. But, were it otherwise, the injury is nothing. Those who feel themselves incapable of suffering the most benevolent plain dealing, would derive least benefit from the prescription, and they avoid the physician. Thus is he delivered, without harshness, hypocrisy and deceit, from those whose intercourse he had least reason to desire; and the more his character is understood, the more his acquaintance will be select, his company being chiefly sought by the ingenuous, the well disposed, and those who are desirous of improvement.

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Appendix, No. II.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

APPENDIX, No. III, P. 252.

SUBJECT OF SINCERITY RESUMED

a case proposed.—arguments in favour of concealment.—previous question: is truth in general to be partially communicated?—customary effects of sincerity—of insincerity—upon him who practises it—2. misanthropy—3. disingenuity—upon the spectators.—sincerity delineated—its general importance.—application.—duty respecting the choice of a residence.

TO enable us more accurately to judge of the extent of the obligation to be sincere, let us suppose, “that I am resident, as a native or otherwise, in the kingdom of Portugal, and that I am of opinion that the establishment, civil and religious, of that country is in a high degree injurious to the welfare and improvement of the inhabitants.” Ought I explicitly to declare the sentiments I entertain? To this question I answer, that “my immediate duty is to seek for myself a different residence.”

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. III.
A case proposed

The arguments in favour of concealment in this case are obvious. “That country is subject to a high degree of despotism, and, if I delivered my sentiments in this frank manner, especially if along with this I were ardent and indefatigable in endeavouring to proselyte the inhabitants, my sincerity would not be endured. In that country the institution of the holy inquisition still flourishes, and the fathers of this venerable court would find means effectually to silence me, before I had well opened my commission. The inhabitants, wholly unaccustomed to such bold assertions as those I uttered, would feel their pious ears inexpressibly shocked, and the martyrdom I endured, instead of producing the good effects with which martyrdom is sometimes attended, would soon be forgotten, and, as long as it was remembered, would be remembered only with execrations of my memory. If on the contrary I concealed my sentiments, I might spend a long life in acts of substantial benevolence. If I concealed them in part, I might perhaps by a prudent and gradual disclosure effect that revolution in the opinions of the inhabitants, which by my precipitation in the other case I defeated in the outset. These arguments in favour of concealment are not built upon cowardice and selfishness, or upon a recollection of the horrible tortures to which I should be subjected. They flow from considerations of philanthropy, and an endeavour fairly to estimate in what mode my exertions may be rendered most conducive to the general good.”

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. III.
Arguments in favour
of concealment

Before we enter upon their direct examination, it may be proper to premise some general observations. In the first place, let us calmly enquire whether the instance here stated be of the nature of an exception or a rule. “Ought I universally to tell only a small

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. III.
Previous question: Is
truth in general to be

part of the truth at a time, careful not to shock the prejudices of my hearers, and thus lead them imperceptibly to conclusions which would have revolted them at first; or am I to practise this method only, where the risk is great, and my life may be the forfeit?" It would seem as if truth were a sacred deposit, which I had no right to deal out in shreds to my fellow men, just as my temper or my prudence should dictate. It would seem as if it were an unworthy artifice, by an ingenious arrangement of my materials to trick men into a conclusion, to which frankness, ingenuity and sincerity would never have conducted them. It would seem as if the shock I am so careful to avoid were favourable to the health and robust constitution of mind; and that, though I might in this way produce least temporary effect, the ultimate result would afford a balance greatly in favour of undisguised sincerity.

partially
communicated?

A second preliminary proper to be introduced in this place consists in a recollection of the general effects of sincerity and insincerity, the reasons for which the one is commonly laudable and the other to be blamed, independently of the subjects about which they may be employed. Sincerity is laudable, on account of the firmness and energy of character it never fails to produce. "An upright man," it has sometimes been said, "ought to carry his heart in his hand." He ought to have an ingenuousness which shrinks from no examination. The commerce between his tongue and his heart is uniform. Whatever he speaks you can depend upon to be the truth and the whole truth. The designs he has formed he employs no artifice to conceal. He tells you in the first instance: "This is the proposition I mean to demonstrate. I put you upon your guard. I will not take you by surprise. If what I affirm be the truth, it will bear your scrutiny. If it were error, I could have recourse to no means more equivocal, than that of concealing in every step of the process the object in which my exertions were intended to terminate."

Customary effects of
sincerity:

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. III.

Insincerity is to be blamed, because it has an immediate tendency to vitiate the integrity of character. "I must conceal the opinions I entertain," suppose, "from the holy father inquisitor." What method shall I employ for this purpose? Shall I hide them as an impenetrable secret from all the world? If this be the system I adopt, the consequence is an instant and immediate end to the improvement of my mind. It is by the efforts of a daring temper that improvements and discoveries are made. The seeds of discovery are scattered in every thinking mind, but they are too frequently starved by the ungenial soil upon which they fall. Every man suspects the absurdity of kings and lords, and the injustice of that glaring and oppressive inequality which subsists in most civilised countries. But he dares not let his mind loose in so adventurous a subject. If I tell my thoughts, I derive from the act of communication encouragement to proceed. I perceive in what manner they are received by others, and this perception acts by rebound upon my own progress. If they be received cordially, I derive new encouragement from the approbation of others. If they be received with opposition and distrust, I am induced to revise them. I detect their errors, or I strengthen my arguments, and add new truths to those which I had previously

of insincerity:

upon him who
practises it:

1. the suspension of
improvement:

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. III.

accumulated. What can excite me to the pursuit of discovery, if I know that I am never to communicate my discoveries? It is in the nature of things impossible, that the man, who has determined with himself never to utter the truths he knows, should be an intrepid and indefatigable thinker. The link which binds together the inward and the outward man is indissoluble; and he, that is not bold in speech, will never be ardent and unprejudiced in enquiry. Add to this, that conscious disguise has the worst effect upon the temper, and converts virtue, which ought to be frank, social and ingenuous, into a solitary, morose and misanthropical principle.

2. misanthropy:

But let us conceive that the method I employ to protect myself from persecution is different from that above stated. Let us suppose that I communicate my sentiments, but with caution and reserve. This system involves with it an endless train of falshood, duplicity and tergiversation. When I communicate my sentiments, it is under the inviolable seal of secrecy. If my zeal carry me any great lengths, and my love of truth be ardent, I shall wish to communicate it as far as the bounds of prudence will possibly admit, and it will be strange if in a course of years I do not commit one mistake in my calculation. My grand secret is betrayed, and suspicion is excited in the breast of the father inquisitor. What shall I do now? I must, I suppose, stoutly deny the fact. I must compose my features into a consistent expression of the most natural ignorance and surprise, happy if I have made such progress in the arts of hypocrisy and falshood, as to put the change upon the wild beast who is ready to devour me. The most consummate impostor is upon this hypothesis the man of most perfect virtue.

3. disingenuity:

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. III.

But this is not all. My character for benevolence being well known, I am likely to be surrounded by persons of good humoured indiscretion rather than by inveterate enemies. Of every man who questions me about my real sentiments I must determine first, whether he simply wish to be informed, or whether his design be to betray me. The character of virtue seems in its own nature to be that of firm and unalterable resolution, confident in its own integrity. But the character that results from this system begins in hesitation, and ends in disgrace. I am questioned whether such be my real sentiments. I deny it. My questioner returns to the charge with an, "Oh, but I heard it from such a one, and he was present when you delivered them." What am I to do now? Am I to asperse the character of the honest reporter of my words? Am I to make an impotent effort to get rid of the charge; and, instead of establishing my character for orthodoxy, astonish my informer with my cool and intrepid effrontery?

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. III.

Insincerity has the worst effect both upon him who practises, and upon them who behold it. It deprives virtue of that conscious magnanimity and ease, which ought ever to be ranked among its noblest effects. It requires the perpetual exercise of presence of mind, not for the purpose of telling the most useful truths in the best manner, but in order to invent a consistent catalogue of lies, and to utter them with a countenance at war with every thing that is passing in my heart. It destroys that confidence on the part of my hearers, which ought to be

upon the spectators

inseparable from virtue. They cannot all of them be expected to understand the deep plan of benevolence and the total neglect of all selfish and timid considerations by which I am supposing my conduct to be regulated. But they can all see my duplicity and tergiversation. They all know that I excel the most consummate impostor in the coolness with which I can utter falshood, and the craft with which I can support it.

Sincerity has sometimes been brought into disrepute by the absurd system according to which it has been pursued, and still oftener by the whimsical picture which the adversaries of undistinguishing sincerity have made of it. It is not necessary that I should stop every person that I meet in the street to inform him

Sincerity delineated

of my sentiments. It is not necessary that I should perpetually talk to the vulgar and illiterate of the deepest and sublimest truths. All that is necessary is, that I should practise no concealment, that I should preserve my disposition and character untainted. Whoever questions me, it is necessary that I should have no secrets or reserves, but be always ready to return a frank and explicit answer. When I undertake by argument to establish any principle, it is necessary that I should employ no circuitous methods, but clearly state in the first instance the object I have in view. Having satisfied this original duty, I may fairly call upon my hearer for the exercise of his patience. "It is true," I may say, "that the opinion I deliver will appear shocking to your prejudices, but I will now deliberately and minutely assign the reasons upon which it is founded. If they appear satisfactory, receive; if they be inconclusive, reject it." This is the ground work of sincerity. The superstructure is the propagation of every important truth, because it conduces to the improvement of man whether individually or collectively; and the telling all I know of myself and of my neighbour, because strict justice and unequivocal publicity are the best security for every virtue.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. III.

Sincerity then, in ordinary cases at least, seems to be of so much importance, that it is my duty first to consider how to preserve my sincerity untainted, and afterwards to select the best means in my power in each particular situation, of benefiting mankind. Sincerity is one of those paramount and general rules, which is never to give way to the affair of the day. I may imagine perhaps that falshood and deceit may be most beneficial in some particular instances, as I might imagine upon the subject of a preceding chapter, that it would be virtuous to plant my dagger in the heart of a tyrant. But we should be cautious of indulging our imaginations in these instances. The great law of always employing ingenuous and honourable means seems to be of more importance than the exterminating any local and temporary evils. I well know in the present case what good will result from a frank and undisguised principle of action, and what evil from deceit, duplicity and falshood. But I am much less certain of the good that will arise under particular circumstances from a neglect of these principles.

Its general importance

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IV. Appendix, No. III.

Having thus unfolded the true ground of reasoning upon this subject, we will return to the question respecting the conduct to be observed by the reformer in Portugal.

Application

And here the true answer will perhaps be found to be that which has been above delivered, that a person so far enlightened upon these subjects, ought by no consideration to be prevailed upon to settle in Portugal; and, if he were there already, ought to quit the country with all convenient speed. His efforts in Portugal would probably be vain; but there is some other country in which they will be attended with the happiest consequences.

Duty respecting the choice of a residence

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Appendix, No. III.

It may be objected, “that some person must begin the work of reformation in Portugal, and why should it not be the individual of whom we are treating?” But the answer is, that, in the sense supposed in this objection, it is not necessary that any body should begin. These great and daring truths ought to be published in England, France and other countries; and the dissemination that will attend them here, will produce a report and afford an example, which after some time may prepare them a favourable reception there.

The great chain of causes from which every event in the universe takes its rise, has sufficiently provided for the gradual instruction of mankind, without its being necessary that individuals should violate their principles and sacrifice their integrity to accomplish it. Perhaps there never was a mind that so far outran the rest of the species, but that there was some country in which the man that possessed it might safely tell all he knew. The same causes that ripen the mind of the individual are acting generally, ripening similar minds, and giving a certain degree of similar impression to whole ages and countries. There exist perhaps at this very moment in Portugal, or soon will exist, minds, which, though mere children in science compared with their gigantic neighbours in a more favoured soil, are yet accurately adapted to the improvement of their countrymen. If by any sport of nature an exotic should spring up, let him be transplanted to a climate that will prove more favourable to his vigour and utility. Add to this, that, when we are inclined to set an inordinate value upon our own importance, it may be reasonable to suspect that we are influenced by some lurking principle of timidity or vanity. It is by no means certain that the individual ever yet existed, whose life was of so much value to the community, as to be worth preserving at so great an expence, as that of his sincerity.

BOOK IV. CHAP. IV. Appendix, No. III.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. V.

OF FREE WILL AND NECESSITY

importance of the question.—definition of necessity.—why supposed to exist in the operations of the material universe.—the case of the operations of mind is parallel.—indications of necessity—in history—in our judgments of character—in our schemes of policy—in our ideas of moral discipline.—objection from the fallibility of our expectations in human conduct.—answer.—origin and universality of the sentiment of free will.—the sentiment of necessity also universal.—the truth of this sentiment argued from the nature of volition.—hypothesis of free will examined.—self-determination.—indifference.—the will not a distinct faculty.—free will disadvantageous to its possessor.—of no service to morality.

HAVING now finished the theoretical part of our enquiry, so far as appeared to be necessary to afford a foundation for our reasoning respecting the different provisions of political institution, we might directly proceed to the consideration of those provisions. It will not however be useless to pause in this place, in order to consider those general principles of the human mind, which are most intimately connected with the topics of political reasoning* .

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

None of these principles seems to be of greater importance than that which affirms that all actions are necessary.

Most of the reasonings upon which we have hitherto been employed, though perhaps constantly built upon this doctrine as a postulate, will yet by their intrinsic evidence, however inconsistently with his opinion upon this primary topic, be admitted by the advocate of free will. But it ought not to be the present design of political enquirers to treat the questions that may present themselves superficially. It will be found upon maturer reflection that this doctrine of moral necessity includes in it consequences of the highest moment, and leads to a bold and comprehensive view of man in society, which cannot possibly be entertained by him who has embraced the opposite opinion. Severe method would have required that this proposition should have been established in the first instance, as an indispensable foundation of moral reasoning of every sort. But there are well

Importance of the question

disposed persons, who notwithstanding the evidence with which it is attended, have been alarmed at its consequences; and it was perhaps proper, in compliance with their mistake, to shew that the moral reasonings of this work did not stand in need of this support, in any other sense than moral reasonings do upon every other subject.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

To the right understanding of any arguments that may be

adduced under this head, it is requisite that we should have a clear idea of the meaning of the term necessity. He who affirms that all actions are necessary, means, that, if we form a just and complete view of all the circumstances in which a living or intelligent being is placed, we shall find that he could not in any moment of his existence have acted otherwise than he has acted. According to this assertion there is in the transactions of mind nothing loose, precarious and uncertain. Upon this question the advocate of liberty in the philosophical sense must join issue. He must, if he mean any thing, deny this certainty of conjunction between moral antecedents and consequents. Where all is constant and invariable, and the events that arise uniformly flow from the circumstances in which they originate, there can be no liberty.

Definition of necessity.

It is acknowledged that in the events of the material universe every thing is subjected to this necessity. The tendency of investigation and enquiry relatively to this topic of human knowledge has been, more effectually to exclude chance, as our improvements extended. Let us consider what is the species of evidence that has satisfied philosophers upon this point. Their only valid ground of reasoning has been from experience. The argument which has induced mankind to conceive of the universe as governed by certain laws, and to entertain the idea of necessary connexion between successive events, has been an observed similarity in the order of succession. If, when we had once remarked two events succeeding each other, we had never had occasion to see that individual succession repeated; if we saw innumerable events in perpetual progression without any apparent order, so that all our observation would not enable us, when we beheld one, to pronounce that another of such a particular class might be expected to follow; we should never have conceived of the existence of necessary connexion, or have had an idea corresponding to the term cause.

Why supposed to exist

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.
in the operations of
the material universe

Hence it follows that all that strictly speaking we know of the material universe is this succession of events. Uniform succession irresistibly forces upon the mind the idea of abstract connexion. When we see the sun constantly rise in the morning and set at night, and have had occasion to observe this phenomenon invariably taking place through the whole period of our existence, we cannot avoid believing that there is some cause producing

this uniformity of event. But the principle or virtue by which one event is conjoined to another we never see.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

Let us take some familiar illustrations of this truth. Can it be imagined that any man by the inspection and analysis of gunpowder would have been enabled, previously to experience, to predict its explosion? Would he previously to experience have been enabled to predict, that one piece of marble having a flat and polished surface might with facility be protruded along another in a horizontal, but would with considerable pertinacity resist separation in a perpendicular direction? The simplest phenomena of the most hourly occurrence were originally placed at an equal distance from human sagacity.

There is a certain degree of obscurity incident to this subject arising from the following circumstance. All human knowledge is the result of perception. We know nothing of any substance but by experience. If it produced no effects, it would be no subject of human intelligence. We collect a considerable number of these effects, and, by their perceived uniformity having reduced them into general classes, form a general idea annexed to the subject that produces them. It must be admitted, that a definition of any substance, that is, any thing that deserves to be called knowledge respecting it, will enable us to predict some of its future possible effects, and that for this plain reason, that defi

nition is prediction under another name. But, though, when we have gained the idea of impenetrability as a general phenomenon of matter, we can predict some of its effects, there are others which we cannot predict: or in other words, we know none of its effects but such as we have actually remarked, added to an expectation that similar events will arise under similar circumstances, proportioned to the constancy with which they have been observed to take place in our past experience. Finding as we do by repeated experiments, that material substances have the property of resistance, and that one substance in a state of rest, when impelled by another, passes into a state of motion, we are still in want of more particular observation to enable us to predict the specific effects that will follow from this impulse in each of the bodies. Enquire of a man who knows nothing more of matter than its general property of impenetrability, what will be the result of one ball of matter impinging upon another, and you will soon find how little this general property can inform him of the particular laws of motion. We suppose him to know that it will communicate motion to the second ball. But what quantity of motion will it communicate? What effects will the impulse produce upon the impelling ball? Will it continue to move in the same direction? will it recoil in the opposite direction? will it fly off obliquely, or will it subside into a state of rest? All these events will appear equally probable to him whom a series of observations upon the past has not instructed as to what he is to expect from the future.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

From these remarks we may sufficiently collect what is the species of knowledge we possess respecting the laws of the material universe. No experiments we are able to make, no reasonings we are able to deduce, can ever instruct us in the principle of causation, or shew us for what reason it is that one event has, in every instance in which it has been known to occur, been the precursor of another event of a certain given description. Yet we reasonably believe that these events are bound together by a perfect necessity, and exclude from our ideas of matter and motion the supposition of chance or an uncaused event. Association of ideas obliges us, after having seen two events perpetually conjoined, to pass, as soon as one of them occurs, to the recollection of the other: and, in cases where this transition never deceives us, but the ideal succession is always found to be an exact copy of the future event, it is impossible that this species of foresight should not convert into a general foundation of reasoning. We cannot take a single step upon this subject, which does not partake of the species of operation we denominate abstraction. Till we have been led to consider the rising of the sun to-morrow as an incident of the same species as its rising today, we cannot deduce from it similar consequences. It is the business of science to carry

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

this task of generalisation to its farthest extent, and to reduce the diversified events of the universe to a finall number of original principles.

Let us proceed to apply these reasonings concerning matter to the illustration of the theory of mind. Is it possible in this latter theory, as in the former subject, to discover any general principles? Can intellect be made a topic of science? Are we able to reduce the multiplied phenomena of mind to any certain standard of reasoning? If the affirmative of these questions be conceded, the inevitable consequence appears to be, that mind, as well as matter, exhibits a constant conjunction of events, and affords a reasonable presumption to the necessary connexion of those events. It is of no importance that we cannot see the ground of that connexion, or imagine how propositions and reasoning, when presented to the mind of a percipient being, are able by necessary consequence to generate volition and animal motion; for, if there be any truth in the above reasonings, we are equally incapable of perceiving the ground of connexion between any two events in the material universe, the common and received opinion that we do perceive such ground of connexion being in reality nothing more than a vulgar prejudice.

The case of the opera

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.
tions of mind is
parallel

That mind is a topic of science may be argued from all those branches of literature and enquiry which have mind for their subject. What species of amusement or instruction would history afford us, if there were no ground of inference from moral causes to effects, if certain temptations and inducements did not in all ages and climates produce a certain series of actions, if we were unable to trace connexion and a principle of unity in men's tempers, propensities and transactions? The amusement would be inferior to that which we derive from the perusal of a chronological

Indications of
necessity:

in history:

table, where events have no order but that of time; since, however the chronologist may neglect to mark the internal connexion between successive transactions, the mind of the reader is busied in supplying that connexion from memory or imagination: but the very idea of such connexion would never have suggested itself, if we had never found the source of that idea in experience. The instruction arising from the perusal of history would be absolutely none; since instruction implies in its very nature the classing and generalising of objects. But, upon the supposition on which we are arguing, all objects would be unconnected and disjunct, without the possibility of affording any grounds of reasoning or principles of science.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

The idea correspondent to the term character inevitably includes in it the assumption of necessary connexion. The character of any man is the result of a long series of impressions communicated to his mind, and modifying it in a certain manner, so as to enable us, from a number of these modifications and impressions being given, to predict his conduct. Hence arise his temper and habits, respecting which we reasonably conclude, that they will not be abruptly superseded and reversed; and that, if they ever be reversed, it will not be accidentally, but in consequence of some strong

in our judgments of
character:

reason persuading, or some extraordinary event modifying his mind. If there were not this original and essential connexion between motives and actions, and, which forms one particular branch of this principle, between men's past and future actions, there could be no such thing as character, or as a ground of inference enabling us to predict what men would be from what they have been.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

From the same idea of necessary connexion arise all the schemes of policy, in consequence of which men propose to themselves by a certain plan of conduct to prevail upon others to become the tools and instruments of their purposes. All the arts of courtship and flattery, of playing upon men's hopes and fears, proceed upon the supposition that mind is subject to certain laws, and that, provided we be skilful and assiduous enough in applying the cause, the effect will inevitably follow.

in our schemes of policy:

Lastly, the idea of moral discipline proceeds entirely upon this principle. If I carefully persuade, exhort, and exhibit motives to another, it is because I believe that motives have a tendency to influence his conduct. If I reward or punish him, either with a view to his own improvement or as an example to others, it is because I have been led to believe that rewards and punishments are calculated in their own nature to affect the sentiments and practices of mankind.

in our ideas of moral discipline

There is but one conceivable objection against the inference from these premises to the necessity of human actions. It may be alledged, that "though there is a real connexion between motives and actions, yet that this connexion may not amount to a certainty, and that of consequence the mind still retains an inherent activity by which it can at pleasure dissolve this connexion. Thus for example, when I address argument and persuasion to my neighbour to induce him to adopt a certain species of conduct, I do it not with a certain expectation of success, and am not utterly disappointed if all my efforts fail of their effect. I make a reserve for a certain faculty of liberty he is supposed to possess, which may at last counteract the best digested projects."

Objection from the fallibility of our expectations in human conduct

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

But in this objection there is nothing peculiar to the case of mind. It is just so in matter. I see a part only of the premises, and therefore can pronounce only with uncertainty upon the conclusion. A philosophical experiment, which has succeeded a hundred times, may altogether fail upon the next trial. But what does the philosopher conclude from this? Not that there is a liberty of choice in his retort and his materials, by which they baffle the best formed expectations. Not that the connexion between effects and causes is imperfect, and that part of the effect happens from no cause at all. But that there was some other cause concerned whose operation he did not perceive, but which a fresh investigation will probably lay open to him. When the science of the material universe was in its infancy, men were sufficiently prompt to refer events to accident and chance; but the farther they have extended their enquiries and

Answer

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

observation, the more reason they have found to conclude that every thing takes place according to necessary and universal laws.

The case is exactly parallel with respect to mind. The politician and the philosopher, however they may speculatively entertain the opinion of free will, never think of introducing it into their scheme of accounting for events. If an incident turn out otherwise than they expected, they take it for granted, that there was some unobserved bias, some habit of thinking, some prejudice of education, some singular association of ideas, that disappointed their prediction; and, if they be of an active and enterprising temper, they return, like the natural philosopher, to search out the secret spring of this unlooked for event.

The reflections into which we have entered upon the doctrine of causes, not only afford us a simple and impressive argument in favour of the doctrine of necessity, but suggest a very obvious reason why the doctrine opposite to this has been in a certain degree the general opinion of mankind. It has appeared that the idea of necessary connexion between events of any sort is the lesson of experience, and the vulgar never arrive at the universal application of this principle even to the phenomena of the material universe. In the easiest and most familiar instances, such as the impinging of one ball of matter upon another and its consequences, they willingly admit the interference of chance, or an event uncaused. In this instance however, as both the impulse

Origin and universality of the sentiment of free will

and its effects are subjects of observation to the senses, they readily imagine that they perceive the absolute principle which causes motion to be communicated from the first ball to the second. Now the very same prejudice and precipitate conclusion, which induce them to believe that they discover the principle of motion in objects of sense, act in an opposite direction with respect to such objects as cannot be subjected to the examination of sense. The manner in which an idea or proposition suggested to the mind of a percipient being produces animal motion they never see; and therefore readily conclude that there is no necessary connexion between these events.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

But, if the vulgar will universally be found to be the advocates of free will, they are not less strongly, however inconsistently, impressed with the belief of the doctrine of necessity. It is a well known and a just observation, that, were it not for the existence of general laws to which the events of the material universe always conform, man could never have been either a reasoning or a moral being. The most considerable actions of our lives are directed by foresight. It is because he foresees the regular succession of the seasons, that the farmer sows his field, and after the expiration of a certain term expects a crop. There would be no kindness in my administering food to the hungry, and no injustice in my thrusting a drawn sword against the bosom of my friend, if it were not the established quality of food to nourish, and of a sword to wound.

The sentiment of necessity also universal

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

But the regularity of events in the material universe will not of itself afford a sufficient foundation of morality and prudence. The voluntary conduct of our neighbours enters for a share into almost all those calculations upon which our own plans and determinations are founded. If voluntary conduct, as well as material impulse, were not subjected to general laws, included in the system of cause and effect, and a legitimate topic of prediction and foresight, the certainty of events in the material universe would be productive of little benefit. But in reality the mind passes from one of these topics of speculation to the other, without accurately distributing them into classes, or imagining that there is any difference in the certainty with which they are attended. Hence it appears that the most uninstructed peasant or artisan is practically a necessarian. The farmer calculates as securely upon the inclination of mankind to buy his corn when it is brought into the market, as upon the tendency of the seasons to ripen it. The labourer no more suspects that his employer will alter his mind and not pay him his daily wages, than he suspects that his tools will refuse to perform those functions today, in which they were yesterday employed with success*
.

Another argument in favour of the doctrine of necessity, not less clear and irresistible than that from the consideration of cause and effect, will arise from any consistent explication that can be given of the nature of voluntary motion. The motions of the animal system distribute themselves into two great classes, voluntary and involuntary. Involuntary motion, whether it be conceived to take place independently of the mind, or to be the result of thought and perception, is so called, because the consequences of that motion, either in whole or in part, did not enter into the view of the mind when the motion commenced. Thus the cries of a new-born infant are not less involuntary than the circulation of the blood; it being impossible that the sounds first resulting from a certain agitation of the animal frame should be foreseen, since foresight is the fruit of experience.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.
The truth of this sentiment argued from the nature of volition

From these observations we may deduce a rational and consistent account of the nature of volition. Voluntary motion is that which is accompanied with foresight, and flows from intention and design. Volition is that state of an intellectual being, in which, the mind being affected in a certain manner by the apprehension of an end to be accomplished, a certain motion of the organs and members of the animal frame is found to be produced.

Here then the advocates of intellectual liberty have a clear dilemma proposed to their choice. They must ascribe this freedom, this imperfect connexion of effects and causes, either to our voluntary or our involuntary motions. They have already made their determination. They are aware that to ascribe freedom to that which is involuntary, even if the assumption could be maintained, would be altogether foreign to the great subjects of moral, theological or political enquiry. Man would not be in any degree more of an agent or an accountable being, though it could be proved that all his involuntary motions sprung up in a fortuitous and capricious manner.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

But on the other hand to ascribe freedom to our voluntary actions is an express contradiction in terms. No motion is voluntary any farther than it is accompanied with intention and design, and flows from the apprehension of an end to be accomplished. So far as it flows in any degree from another source, so far it is involuntary. The new-born infant foresees nothing, therefore all his motions are involuntary. A person arrived at maturity takes an extensive survey of the consequences of his actions, therefore he is eminently a voluntary and rational being. If any part of my conduct be destitute of all foresight of the effects to result, who is there that ascribes to it depravity and vice? Xerxes acted just as soberly as such a reasoner, when he caused his attendants to inflict a thousand lashes on the waves of the Hellespont.

The truth of the doctrine of necessity will be still more evident, if we consider the absurdity of the opposite hypothesis. One of its principal ingredients is self determination. Liberty in an imperfect and popular sense is ascribed to the motions of the animal system, when they result from the foresight and deliberation of the intellect, and not from external compulsion. It

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.
Hypothesis of free will examined.

Self determination

is in this sense that the word is commonly used in moral and political reasoning. Philosophical reasoners therefore, who have desired to vindicate the property of freedom, not only to our external motions, but to the acts of the mind, have been obliged to repeat this process. Our external actions are then said to be free, when they truly result from the determination of the mind. If our volitions, or internal acts be also free, they must in like manner result from the determination of the mind, or in other words, “the mind in adopting them” must be “self determined.” Now nothing can be more evident than that that in which the mind exercises its freedom, must be an act of the mind. Liberty therefore according to this hypothesis consists in this, that every choice we make has been chosen by us, and every act of the mind been preceded and produced by an act of the mind. This is so true, that in reality the ultimate act is not styled free from any quality of its own, but because the mind in adopting it was self determined, that is, because it was preceded by another act. The ultimate act resulted completely from the determination that was its precursor. It was itself necessary; and, if we would look for freedom, it must be in the preceding act. But in that

preceding act also, if the mind were free, it was self determined, that is, this volition was chosen by a preceding volition, and by

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

the same reasoning this also by another antecedent to itself. All the acts except the first were necessary, and followed each other as inevitably as the links of a chain do, when the first link is drawn forward. But then neither was this first act free, unless the mind in adopting it were self determined, that is, unless this act were chosen by a preceding act. Trace back the chain as far as you please, every act at which you arrive is necessary. That act, which gives the character of freedom to the whole, can never be discovered; and, if it could, in its own nature includes a contradiction.

Another idea which belongs to the hypothesis of self determination, is, that the mind is not necessarily inclined this way or that by the motives which are presented to it, by the clearness or obscurity with which they are apprehended, or by the temper and character which preceding habits may have generated; but that by its inherent activity it is equally capable of

Indifference

proceeding either way, and passes to its determination from a previous state of absolute indifference. Now what sort of activity is that which is equally inclined to all kinds of actions? Let us suppose a particle of matter endowed with an inherent propensity to motion. This propensity must either be to move in one particular direction, and then it must for ever move in that direction unless counteracted by some external impression; or it must have an equal tendency to all directions, and then the result must be a state of perpetual rest.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

The absurdity of this consequence is so evident, that the advocates of intellectual liberty have endeavoured to destroy its force by means of a distinction. "Motive," it has been said, "is indeed the occasion, the *sine qua non* of volition, but it has no inherent power to compel volition. Its influence depends upon the free and unconstrained surrender of the mind. Between opposite motives and considerations the mind can choose as it pleases, and by its determination can convert the motive which is weak and insufficient in the comparison into the strongest." But this hypothesis will be found exceedingly inadequate to the purpose for which it is produced. Motives must either have a necessary and irresistible influence, or they can have no influence at all.

For, first, it must be remembered, that the ground or reason of any event, of whatever nature it be, must be contained among the circumstances which precede that event. The mind is supposed to be in a state of previous indifference, and therefore cannot be, in itself considered, the source of the particular choice that is made. There is a motive on one side and a motive on the other: and between these lie the true ground and reason of preference. But, wherever there is tendency to preference, there may be degrees of tendency. If the degrees be equal, preference cannot follow: it is equivalent to the putting equal weights into the opposite scales of a balance. If one of them have a greater tendency to preference than the other, that which has the greatest tendency must ultimately prevail. When two things are balanced against each other, so much amount may be conceived to be struck off from each side as exists in the smaller sum, and the overplus that belongs to the greater is all that truly enters into the consideration.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

Add to this, secondly, that, if motive have not a necessary influence, it is altogether superfluous. The mind cannot first choose to be influenced by a motive, and afterwards submit to its operation: for in that case the preference would belong wholly to this previous volition. The determination would in reality be complete in the first instance; and the motive, which came in afterwards, might be the pretext, but could not be the true source of the proceeding* .

Lastly, it may be observed upon the hypothesis of free will, that the whole system is built upon a distinction where there is no difference, to wit, a distinction between the intellectual and active powers of the mind. A mysterious philosophy taught men to suppose, that, when the understanding had perceived any object to be desirable, there was need of some distinct power to put the body in motion. But reason finds no ground

The will not a distinct faculty

for this supposition; nor is it possible to conceive, that, in the case of an intellectual faculty placed in an aptly organised body, preference can exist, together with a consciousness, gained from experience, of our power to obtain the object preferred, without a certain motion of the animal frame being the necessary result. We need only attend to the obvious meaning of the terms in order to perceive that the will is merely, as it has been happily termed, the last act of the understanding, one of the different cases of the association of ideas. What indeed is preference, but a perception of something that really inheres or is supposed to inhere in the objects themselves? It is the judgment, true or erroneous, which the mind makes respecting such things as are brought into comparison with each other. If this had been sufficiently attended to, the freedom of the will would never have been gravely maintained by philosophical writers, since no man ever imagined that we were free to feel or not to feel an impression made upon our organs, and to believe or not to believe a proposition demonstrated to our understanding.

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

It must be unnecessary to add any thing farther on this head, unless it be a momentary recollection of the sort of benefit that freedom of the will would confer upon us, supposing it to be possible. Man being, as we have now found him to be, a simple substance, governed by the apprehensions of his understanding, nothing farther is requisite but the improvement of his reasoning faculty, to make him virtuous and happy. But, did he possess a faculty independent of the understanding, and capable of resisting from mere caprice the most powerful arguments, the best education and the most sedulous instruction might be of no use to him. This freedom we shall easily perceive to be his bane and his curse; and the only hope of lasting benefit to the species would be, by drawing closer the connexion between the external motions and the understanding, wholly to extirpate it. The virtuous man, in proportion to his improvement, will be under the constant influence of fixed and invariable principles; and such a being as we conceive God to be, can never in any one instance have exercised this liberty, that is, can never

Free will
disadvantageous to its
possessor:

BOOK IV. CHAP. V.

have acted in a foolish and tyrannical manner. Freedom of the will is absurdly represented as necessary to render the mind susceptible of moral principles; but in reality, so far as we act with liberty, so far as we are independent of motives, our conduct is as independent of morality as it is of reason, nor is it possible that we should deserve either praise or blame for a proceeding thus capricious and indisciplinable.

of no service to
morality

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. VI.

INFERENCES FROM THE DOCTRINE OF NECESSITY

idea it suggests to us of the universe.—influence on our moral ideas—action—virtue—exertion—persuasion—exhortation—ardour—complacency and aversion—punishment—repentance—praise and bland blame—intellectual tranquillity.—language of necessity recommended.

CONSIDERING then the doctrine of moral necessity as sufficiently established, let us proceed to the consequences that are to be deduced from it. This view of things presents us with an idea of the universe as connected and cemented in all its parts, nothing in the boundless progress of things being capable of happening otherwise than it has actually happened. In the life of every human being there is a chain of causes, generated in that eternity which preceded his birth, and going on in regular procession through the whole period of his existence, in consequence of which it was impossible for him to act in any instance otherwise than he has acted.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI. Idea it suggests to us of the universe

The contrary of this having been the conception of the mass of mankind in all ages, and the ideas of contingency and accident having perpetually obtruded themselves, the established language of morality has been universally tinctured with this error. It will therefore be of no trivial importance to enquire how much of this language is founded in the truth of things, and how much of what is expressed by it is purely imaginary. Accuracy of language is the indispensable prerequisite of sound knowledge, and without attention to that subject we can never ascertain the extent and importance of the consequences of necessity.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI. Influence on our moral ideas:

First then it appears, that, in the emphatical and refined sense in which the word has sometimes been used, there is no such thing as action. Man is in no case strictly speaking the beginner of any event or series of events that takes place in the universe, but only the vehicle through which certain causes operate, which causes, if he were supposed not to exist, would cease to operate. Action however, in its more simple and obvious sense, is sufficiently real, and exists equally both in mind and in matter. When a ball upon a billiard board is struck by a person playing, and afterwards impinges upon a second ball, the ball which was first in motion is said to act upon the second, though it operate in the strictest conformity to the impression it received, and the motion it communicates be precisely determined by the circumstances of the case. Exactly similar to this, upon the principles already explained, are the actions of the human mind.

action:

Mind is a real cause, an indispensable link in the great chain of the universe; but not, as has sometimes been supposed, a cause of that paramount description, as to supersede all necessities, and

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI.

be itself subject to no laws and methods of operation. Upon the hypothesis of a God, it is not the choice, apprehension or judgment of that being, so properly as the truth which was the foundation of that judgment, that has been the source of all contingent and particular existences. His existence, if necessary, was necessary only as the sensorium of truth and the medium of its operation.

Is this view of things incompatible with the existence of virtue?

virtue:

If by virtue we understand the operation of an intelligent being in the exercise of an optional power, so that under the same precise circumstances it might or might not have taken place, undoubtedly it will annihilate it.

But the doctrine of necessity does not overturn the nature of things. Happiness and misery, wisdom and error will still be distinct from each other, and there will still be a connexion between them. Wherever there is distinction there is ground for preference and desire, or on the contrary for neglect and aversion. Happiness and wisdom will be objects worthy to be desired, misery and error worthy to be disliked. If therefore by virtue we mean that principle which asserts the preference of the former over the latter, its reality will remain undiminished by the doctrine of necessity.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI.

Virtue, if we would speak accurately, ought to be considered by us in the first instance objectively, rather than as modifying any particular beings. It is a system of general advantage, in their aptitude or inaptitude to which lies the value or worthlessness of all particular existences. This aptitude is in intelligent beings usually termed capacity or power. Now power in the sense of the hypothesis of liberty is altogether chimerical. But power in the sense in which it is sometimes affirmed of inanimate substances, is equally true of those which are animate. A candlestick has the power or capacity of retaining a candle in a perpendicular direction. A knife has a capacity of cutting. In the same manner a human being has a capacity of walking: though it may be no more true of him, than of the inanimate substance, that he has the power of exercising or not exercising that capacity. Again, there are different degrees as well as different classes of capacity. One knife is better adapted for the purposes of cutting than another.

Now there are two considerations relative to any particular being, that excite our approbation, and this whether the being be possessed of consciousness or no. These considerations are capacity and the application of that capacity. We approve of a sharp knife rather than a blunt one, because its capacity is greater. We approve of its being employed in carving food, rather than in maiming men or other animals, because that application of its capacity is preferable. But all approbation or preference is relative to utility or general good. A knife is as capable as a man of being employed in the purposes of virtue, and the one is no more free than the other as to its employment. The mode in which a knife is made subservient to these purposes is by material impulse. The mode in which a man is made subservient is by inducement and persuasion. But both are equally the affair of necessity. The man differs from the

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI.

knife, just as the iron candlestick differs from the brass one; he has one more way of being acted upon. This additional way in man is motive, in the candlestick is magnetism.

But virtue has another sense, in which it is analogous to duty. The virtue of a human being is the application of his capacity to the general good; his duty is the best possible application of that capacity. The words thus explained are to be considered as rather similar to grammatical distinction, than to real and philosophical difference. Thus in Latin *bonus* is *good* as affirmed of a man, *bona* is *good* as affirmed of a woman. In the same manner we can as easily conceive of the capacity of an inanimate as of an animate substance being applied to the general good, and as accurately describe the best possible application of the one as of the other. There is no essential difference between the two cases. But we call the latter virtue and duty, and not the former. These words may in a popular sense be considered as either masculine or feminine, but never neuter.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI.

But, if the doctrine of necessity do not annihilate virtue, it tends to introduce a great change into our ideas respecting it.

exertion:

According to this doctrine it will be absurd for a man to say, "I will exert myself," "I will take care to remember," or even "I will do this." All these expressions imply as if man was or could be something else than what motives make him. Man is in reality a passive, and not an active being. In another sense however he is sufficiently capable of exertion. The operations of his mind may be laborious, like those of the wheel of a heavy machine in ascending a hill, may even tend to wear out the substance of the shell in which it acts, without in the smallest degree impeaching its passive character. If we were constantly aware of this, our minds would not glow less ardently with the love of truth, justice, happiness and mankind. We should have a firmness and simplicity in our conduct, not wasting itself in fruitless struggles and regrets, not hurried along with infantine impatience, but seeing events with their consequences, and calmly and unreservedly given up to the influence of those comprehensive views which this doctrine inspires.

As to our conduct towards others in instances where we were concerned to improve and meliorate their minds, we should address

persuasion:

our representations and remonstrances to them with double confidence. The believer in free will can expostulate with or correct his pupil with faint and uncertain hopes, conscious that the clearest exhibition of truth is impotent, when brought into contest with the unhearing and indisciplinable faculty of will; or in reality, if he were consistent, secure that it could produce no effect at all. The necessarian on the contrary employs real antecedents, and has a right to expect real effects.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI.

But, though he would represent, he would not exhort, for this is a term without a meaning. He would suggest motives to the mind, but he would not call upon it to comply, as if it had a power to comply or not to comply. His office would consist of two parts, the

exhortation:

exhibition of motives to the pursuit of a certain end, and the delineation of the easiest and most effectual way of attaining that end.

There is no better scheme for enabling us to perceive how far any idea that has been connected with the hypothesis of liberty has a real foundation, than to translate the usual mode of expressing it into the language of necessity. Suppose the idea of exhortation so translated to stand thus: "To enable any arguments I may suggest to you to make a suitable impression it is necessary that they should be fairly considered. I proceed therefore to evince to you the importance of attention, knowing, that, if I can make this importance sufficiently manifest attention will inevitably follow." I should however be far better employed in enforcing directly the truth I am desirous to impress, than in having recourse to this circuitous mode of treating attention as if it were a separate faculty. Attention will in reality always be proportionate to our apprehension of the importance of the subject before us.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI.

At first sight it may appear as if, the moment I was satisfied that exertion on my part was no better than a fiction, and that I was the passive instrument of causes exterior to myself, I should become indifferent to the objects which had hitherto interested me the most deeply, and lose all that inflexible perseverance, which seems inseparable from great undertakings. But this cannot be the true state of the case. The more I resign myself to the influence of truth, the clearer will be my perception of it. The less I am interrupted by questions of liberty and caprice, of attention and indolence, the more uniform will be my constancy. Nothing could be more unreasonable than that the sentiment of necessity should produce in me a spirit of neutrality and indifference. The more certain is the connexion between effects and causes, the more chearfulness should I feel in yielding to painful and laborious employments.

ardour:

It is common for men impressed with the opinion of free will to entertain resentment, indignation and anger against those who fall into the commission of vice. How much of these feelings is just, and how much erroneous? The difference between virtue and vice will equally remain upon the opposite hypothesis. Vice therefore must be an object of rejection and virtue of preference; the one must be approved and the other disapproved. But our disapprobation of vice will be of the same nature as our disapprobation of an infectious distemper.

complacence and
aversion:

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI.

One of the reasons why we are accustomed to regard the murderer with more acute feelings of displeasure than the knife he employs, is that we find a more dangerous property, and greater cause for apprehension, in the one than in the other. The knife is only accidentally an object of terror, but against the murderer we can never be enough upon our guard. In the same manner we regard the middle of a busy street with less complacency as a place for walking than the side, and the ridge of a house with more aversion than either. Independently therefore of the idea of freedom, mankind in general find in the enormously vicious a sufficient motive of antipathy and disgust.

With the addition of that idea, it is no wonder that they should be prompted to expressions of the most intemperate abhorrence.

These feelings obviously lead to the prevailing conceptions on the subject of punishment. The doctrine of necessity would teach us to class punishment in the list of the means we possess of reforming error. The more the human mind can be shewn to be under the influence of motive, the more certain it is that punishment will produce a great and unequivocal effect. But the doctrine of necessity will teach us to look upon punishment with no complacency, and at all times to prefer the most direct means of encountering error, which is the development of truth. Whenever punishment is employed under this system, it will be employed, not for any intrinsic recommendation it possesses, but just so far as it shall appear to conduce to general utility.

punishment:

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI.

On the contrary it is usually imagined, that, independently of the utility of punishment, there is proper desert in the criminal, a certain fitness in the nature of things that renders pain the suitable concomitant of vice. It is therefore frequently said, that it is not enough that a murderer should be transported to a desert island, where there should be no danger that his malignant propensities should ever again have opportunity to act; but that it is also right the indignation of mankind against him should express itself in the infliction of some actual ignominy and pain. On the contrary, under the system of necessity the ideas of guilt, crime, desert and accountableness have no place.

Correlative to the feelings of resentment, indignation and anger against the offences of others, are those of repentance, contrition and sorrow for our own. As long as we admit of an essential difference between virtue and vice, no doubt all erroneous

repentance:

conduct whether of ourselves or others will be regarded with disapprobation. But it will in both cases be considered, under the system of necessity, as a link in the great chain of events which could not have been otherwise than it is. We shall therefore no more be disposed to repent of our own faults than of the faults of others. It will be proper to view them both as actions, injurious to the public good, and the repetition of which is to be deprecated. Amidst our present imperfections it will perhaps be useful to recollect what is the error by which we are most easily seduced. But in proportion as our views extend, we shall find motives enough to the practice of virtue, without any partial retrospect to ourselves, or recollection of our own propensities and habits.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI.

In the ideas annexed to the words resentment and repentance there is some mixture of true judgment and a sound conception of the nature of things. There is perhaps still more justice in the notions conveyed by praise and blame, though these also are for the most part founded in the hypothesis of liberty. When I speak of a beautiful landscape or an agreeable sensation, I employ the language of panegyric. I employ it still more emphatically, when I speak of a good action; because I am conscious that panegyric

praise and blame:

has a tendency to procure a repetition of such actions. So far as praise implies nothing more than this, it perfectly accords with the severest philosophy. So far as it implies that the man could have abstained from the virtuous action I applaud, it belongs only to the delusive system of liberty.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI.

A farther consequence of the doctrine of necessity is its tendency to make us survey all events with a tranquil and placid temper, and approve and disapprove without impeachment to our self possession. It is true, that events may be contingent as to any knowledge we possess respecting them, however certain they are in themselves. Thus the advocate of liberty knows that his relation was either lost or saved in the great storm that happened two months ago; he regards this event as past and certain, and yet he does not fail to be anxious about it. But it is not less true, that all anxiety and perturbation imply an imperfect sense of contingency, and a feeling as if our efforts could make some alteration in the event. When the person recollects with clearness that the event is over, his mind grows composed; but presently he feels as if it were in the power of God or man to alter it, and his distress is renewed. All that is more than this is the impatience of curiosity; but philosophy and reason have an evident tendency to prevent an useless curiosity from disturbing our peace. He therefore who regards all things past, present and to come as links of an indissoluble chain, will, as often as he recollects this comprehensive view, be superior to the tumult of passion; and will reflect upon the moral concerns of mankind with the same clearness of perception, the same unalterable firmness of judgment, and the same tranquillity as we are accustomed to do upon the truths of geometry.

intellectual
tranquillity

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VI.

It would be of infinite importance to the cause of science and virtue to express ourselves upon all occasions in the language of necessity. The contrary language is perpetually intruding, and it is difficult to speak two sentences upon any topic connected with human action without it. The expressions of both hypotheses are mixed in inextricable confusion, just as the belief of both hypotheses, however incompatible, will be found to exist in all uninstructed minds. The reformation of which I speak would probably be found exceedingly practicable in itself; though, such is the subtlety of error, that we should at first find several revisals and much laborious study necessary before it could be perfectly weeded out. This must be the author's apology for not having attempted in the present work what he recommends to others. Objects of more immediate importance demanded his attention, and engrossed his faculties.

Language of necessity
recommended

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. VII.

OF THE MECHANISM OF THE HUMAN MIND

nature of mechanism—its classes, material and intellectual.—material system, or of vibrations.—the intellectual system most probable—from the consideration that thought would otherwise be a superfluityx2014fromtheestablishedprished principles of reasoning from effects to causes.—objections refuted.—thoughts which produce animal motion may be—1. involuntary. all animal motions were first involuntary.—2. unattended with consciousness.—the mind cannot have more than one thought at any one time.—objection to this assertion from the case of complex ideas—from various mental operations—as comparison—apprehension—rapidity of the succession of ideas.—application.—duration measured by consciousness.—3. a distinct thought to each motion may be unnecessary.—apparent from the complexity of sensible impressions.—the mind always thinks.—conclusion.—the theory applied to the phenomenon of walking—to the circulation of the blood.—of motion in general.—of dreams.

THE doctrine of necessity being admitted, it follows that the theory of the human mind is properly, like the theory of every other series of events with which we are acquainted, a system of mechanism; understanding by mechanism

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII. Nature of mechanism:

nothing more than a regular connexion of phenomena without any uncertainty of event, so that every incident requires a specific cause, and could be no otherwise in any respect than as the cause determined it to be.

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

But there are two sorts of mechanism capable of being applied to the solution of this case, one which has for its medium only matter and motion, the other which has for its medium thought. Which of these is to be regarded as most probable?

its classes material and intellectual

According to the first we may conceive the human body to be so constituted as to be susceptible of vibrations, in the same manner as the strings of a musical instrument are susceptible of vibrations. These vibrations, having begun upon the surface of the body, are conveyed to the brain; and, in a manner that is equally the result of construction, produce a second set of vibrations beginning in the brain, and conveyed to the different organs or members of the body. Thus it may be supposed, that a piece of iron considerably heated is applied to the body of an infant, and that the report of this uneasiness, or irritation and separation of parts being conveyed to the brain, vents itself again in a shrill and piercing cry. It is in this manner that we are apt to imagine certain convulsive and spasmodic affections to take place in the body. The case, as here described, is similar to that of the bag of a pair of bagpipes, which, being

Material system, or of vibrations

pressed in a certain manner, utters a groan, without any thing more being necessary to account for this phenomenon, than the known laws of matter and motion. Let us add to these vibrations

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

a system of associations to be carried on by traces to be made upon the medullary substance of the brain, by means of which past and present impressions are connected according to certain laws, as the traces happen to approach or run into each other; and we have then a complete scheme for accounting in a certain way for all the phenomena of human action. It is to be observed, that, according to this system, mind or perception is altogether unnecessary to explain the appearances. It might for other reasons be desirable or wise, in the author of the universe for example, to introduce a thinking substance or a power of perception as a spectator of the process. But this percipient power is altogether neutral, having no concern either as a medium or otherwise in producing the events* .

The second system, which represents thought as the medium of operation, is not less a system of mechanism, according to the doctrine of necessity, than the other, but it is a mechanism of a totally different kind.

The intellectual system most probable:

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

There are various reasons calculated to persuade us that this last hypothesis is the most probable. No inconsiderable argument may be derived from the singular and important nature of that property of human beings, which we term thought; which it is surely somewhat violent to strike out of our system as a mere superfluity.

from the consideration that thought would otherwise be a superfluity:

A second reason still more decisive than the former, arises from the constancy with which thought in innumerable instances accompanies the functions of this mechanism. Now this constancy of conjunction has been shewn to be the only ground we have in any imaginable subject for inferring necessary connexion, or that species of relation which exists between cause and effect. We cannot therefore reject the principle which supposes thought to have an efficient share in the mechanism of man, but upon grounds that would vitiate all our reasonings from effects to causes.

from the established principles of reasoning from effects to causes

It may be objected, “that, though this contiguity of event argues necessary connexion, yet the connexion may be exactly the reverse of what is here stated, motion being in all instances the cause, and thought never any thing more than an effect.” But this is contrary to every thing we know of the system of the universe, in which each event appears to be alternately both the one and the other, nothing terminating in itself, but every thing leading on to an endless chain of consequences.

Objections refuted

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

It would be equally vain to object, “that we are unable to conceive how thought can have any tendency to produce motion in the animal system;” since it has just appeared

that this ignorance is by no means peculiar to the subject before us. We are universally unable to perceive the ground of necessary connexion.

It being then sufficiently clear that there are cogent reasons to persuade us that thought is the medium through which the motions of the animal system are generally carried on, let us proceed to consider what is the nature of those thoughts by which the limbs and organs of our body are set in motion. It will then probably be found, that the difficulties which have clogged the intellectual hypothesis, are principally founded in erroneous notions derived from the system of liberty; as if there were any essential difference between those thoughts which are the medium of generating motion, and thoughts in general.

Thoughts which produce animal motion may be,

First, thought may be the source of animal motion, without partaking in any degree of volition, or design. It is certain that there is a great variety of motions in the animal system, which are in every view of the subject involuntary. Such, for example, are the cries of an infant, when it is first impressed with the sensation of pain. Such must be all those motions which flowed from sensation previously to experience. Volition implies that something which is the subject of volition, is regarded as desirable; but we cannot desire any thing, till we have an idea corresponding to the term futurity. Volition implies intention, or design; but we cannot design any thing, till we have the expectation that the existence of that thing is in some way connected with the means employed to produce it. An infant, when he has observed that a voice exciting compassion is the result of certain previous emotions, may have the idea of that voice predominant in his mind during the train of emotions that produce it. But this could not have been the case the first time it was uttered. In the first motions of the animal system, nothing of any sort could possibly be foreseen, and therefore nothing of any sort could be intended. Yet in the very instances here produced the motions have sensation or thought for their constant concomitant; and therefore all the arguments, which have been already alledged, remain in full force to prove that thought is the medium of their production.

1. involuntary

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

Nor will this appear very extraordinary, if we consider the nature of volition itself. In volition, if the doctrine of necessity be true, the mind is altogether passive. Two ideas present themselves in some way connected with each other; and a perception of preferableness necessarily follows. An object having certain desirable qualities, is perceived to be within my reach;

and my hand is necessarily stretched out with an intention to obtain it. If a perception of preferableness and a perception of desirableness irresistibly lead to animal motion, why may not the mere perception of pain? All that the adversary of automatism is concerned to maintain is, that thought is an essential link in the chain; and that, the moment it is taken away, the links that were before it have no longer any tendency to produce motion in the links that were after it. It is possible, that, as a numerous class of motions have their constant origin in thought, so there may be no thoughts altogether unattended with motion.

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

Here it may be proper to observe, that, from the principles already delivered, it follows that all the original motions of the animal system are involuntary. In proportion however as we obtain experience, they are successively made the subjects of reflection and foresight; and of consequence become many of them the themes of intention and design, that is, become voluntary. We shall presently have occasion to suspect that motions, which were at first involuntary, and afterwards by experience and association are made voluntary, may in the process of intellectual operation be made involuntary again.—But to proceed.

All animal motions were first involuntary

Secondly, thought may be the source of animal motion, and yet be unattended with consciousness. This is undoubtedly a distinction of considerable refinement, depending upon the precise meaning of words; and, if any person should choose to express himself differently on the subject, it would be useless obstinately to dispute that difference with him. By the consciousness which accompanies any thought there seems to be something implied distinct from the thought itself. Consciousness is a sort of supplementary reflection, by which the mind not only has the thought, but adverts to its own situation and observes that it has it. Consciousness therefore, however nice the distinction, seems to be a second thought.

2. unattended with consciousness

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

In order to ascertain whether every thought be attended with consciousness, it may be proper to consider whether the mind can ever have more than one thought at any one time. Now this seems altogether contrary to the very nature of mind. My present thought is that to which my present attention is yielded; but I cannot attend to several things at once. This assertion appears to be of the nature of an intuitive axiom; and experience is perpetually reminding us of its truth. In comparing two objects we frequently endeavour as it were to draw them together in the mind, but we seem to be obliged to pass successively from the one to the other.

The mind cannot have more than one thought at any one time

But this principle, though apparently supported both by reason and experience, is not unattended with difficulties. The first is that which arises from the case of complex ideas. This will best be apprehended if we examine it as relates to visible objects. “Let us suppose that I am at present employed in the act of reading. I appear to take in whole words and indeed clusters of words by a single act of the mind. But let it be granted for a moment that I see each letter successively. Yet each letter is made up of parts: the letter D for example of a right line and a curve, and each of these lines of the successive addition or fluxion of points. If I consider the line as a whole, yet its extension is one thing, and its terminations another. I could not see the letter if the black line that describes it and the white surface that bounds it were not each of them in the view of my organ. There must therefore, as it should seem, upon the hypothesis above stated, be an infinite succession of ideas in the mind, before it could apprehend the simplest objects with which we are conversant. But we have no

Objection to This Assertion from the case of complex ideas:

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

feeling of any such thing, but rather of the precise contrary. Thousands of human beings go out of the world without ever apprehending that lines are composed of the addition or fluxion of points. An hypothesis therefore, that is in direct opposition to so many apparent facts, must have a very uncommon portion of evidence to sustain it, if indeed it can be sustained at all.”

The true answer to this objection seems to be the following. The mind can apprehend only a single idea at once, but that idea needs not be in every sense of the word a simple idea. The mind can apprehend two or more objects at a single effort, but it cannot apprehend them as two. There seems no sufficient reason to deny that all those objects which are painted at once

upon the retina of the eye, produce a joint and simultaneous impression upon the mind. But they are not immediately conceived by the mind as many, but as one: so soon as the idea

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VII.

suggests itself that they are made up of parts, these parts cannot be considered by us otherwise than successively. The resolution of objects into their simple elements, is an operation of science and improvement; but it is altogether foreign to our first and original conceptions. In all cases the operation is rather analytical than synthetical, rather that of resolution than composition. We do not begin with the successive perception of elementary parts till we have obtained an idea of a whole; but, beginning with a whole, are capable of reducing it into its elements.

The second difficulty is of a much subtler nature. It consists in the seeming “impossibility of performing any mental operation, such as comparison for example, which has relation to two

from various mental
operations :

or more ideas, if we have not both ideas before us at once, if one of them be completely vanished and gone, before the other

as comparison:

begins to exist.” The cause of this difficulty seems to lie in the mistake of supposing that there is a real interval between the two ideas. It will perhaps be found upon an accurate examination, that, though we cannot have two ideas at once, yet it is not just to say, that the first has perished before the second begins to exist. The instant that connects them, is of no real magnitude,

and produces no real division. The mind is always full. It is this instant therefore that is the true point of comparison.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VII.

It may be objected, “that this cannot be a just representation, since comparison is rather a matter of retrospect deciding between two ideas that have been completely apprehended, than a perception which occurs in the middle, before the second has been yet observed.” To this objection experience will perhaps be found to furnish the true answer. We find in fact that we cannot compare two objects till we have passed and repassed them in the mind.

“Supposing this account of the operation of the mind in comparison to be admitted, yet what shall we say to a complex sentence containing twenty ideas, the sense of which I fully apprehend at a single hearing, nay, even in some cases by that time one half of it has been uttered?”

apprehension:

The mere task of understanding what is affirmed to us is of a very different nature from that of comparison, or any other species of judgment that is to be formed concerning this affirmation. When a number of ideas are presented in a train, though in one sense there be variety, yet in another there is unity. First, there is the unity of uninterrupted succession, the perennial flow as of a stream, where the drop indeed that succeeds is numerically distinct from that which went before, but there is no cessation. Secondly, there is the unity of method. The mind apprehends, as the discourse proceeds, a strict association, from similarity or some other source, between each idea as it follows in the process, and that which went before it.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VII.

The faculty of understanding the different parts of a discourse in their connexion with each other, simple as it appears, is in reality of gradual and slow acquisition. We are by various causes excluded from a minute observation of the progress of the infant mind, and therefore do not readily conceive by how imperceptible advances it arrives at a quickness of apprehension relative to the simplest sentences. But we more easily remark its subsequent improvement, and perceive how long it is before it can apprehend a discourse of any length or a sentence of any abstraction.

Nothing is more certain than the possibility of my perceiving the sort of relation that exists between the different parts of a methodical discourse, for example, Mr. Burke's Speech upon Oeconomical Reform, though it be impossible for me after the severest attention to consider the several parts otherwise than successively. I have a latent feeling of this relation as the discourse proceeds, but I cannot give a firm judgment respecting it otherwise than by retrospect. It may however be suspected that, even in the case of simple apprehension, an accurate attention to the operations of mind would show, that we scarcely

in any instance hear a single sentence, without returning again and again upon the steps of the speaker, and drawing more closely in our minds the preceding members of his period, before

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VII.

he arrives at its conclusion; though even this exertion of mind, subtle as it is, be not of itself thought sufficient to authorise us to give a judgment upon the whole. There may perhaps be cases where the apprehension is more instantaneous. A similar exception appears to take place even in some cases of judgment or comparison. A new association, or a connecting of two ideas by means of a middle term, which were never brought into this relation before, is a task of such a nature, that the strongest mind feels some sense of effort in the operation. But, where the judgment accurately speaking is already made, the operation is in a manner instantaneous. If you say, that a melon is a larger fruit than a cherry, I immediately assent. The judgment, though perhaps never applied to this individual subject, may be said to have been made by me long before. If again you tell me that Cæsar was a worse man than Alexander, I instantly apprehend your meaning; but, unless I have upon some former occasion considered the question, I can neither assent nor dissent till after some reflection.

But, if the principle here stated be true, how infinitely rapid must be the succession of ideas? While I am speaking no two ideas are in my mind at the same time, and yet with what facility do I pass

Rapidity of the
succession of ideas

from one to another? If my discourse be argu mentative, how often do I pass the topics of which it consists in review before I utter them, and even while I am speaking continue the review at intervals without producing any pause in my discourse? How many other sensations are perceived by me during this period, without so much as interrupting, that is, without materially diverting the train of my ideas? My eye successively remarks a thousand objects that present themselves. My mind wanders to the different parts of my body, and receives a sensation from the chair upon which I sit, from the table upon which I lean; from the pinching of a shoe, from a singing in my ear, a pain in my head, or an irritation of the breast. When these most perceptibly occur, my mind passes from one to another, without feeling the minutest obstacle, or being in any degree distracted by their multiplicity. From this cursory view of the subject it appears that we have a multitude of different successive perceptions in every moment of our existence* .

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

Consciousness, as it has been above defined, appears to be one of the departments of memory. Now the nature of memory, so far as it relates to the subject of which we are treating, is exceedingly obvious. An infinite number of thoughts passed through my mind in the last five minutes of my existence. How many of them am I now able to recollect? How many of them shall I recollect to-morrow? One impression after another is perpetually effacing from this intellectual register. Some of them may with great attention and effort be revived; others obtrude themselves uncalled for; and a third sort are perhaps out of the reach of any power of thought to reproduce, as having never left their traces behind them for a moment. If the memory be capable of so many variations and degrees of intensity, may there not be some cases with which it never connects itself? If the succession of thoughts be so inexpressibly rapid, may they not pass over some topics with so delicate a touch, as to elude the supplement of consciousness?

Application

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

It seems to be consciousness, rather than the succession of ideas, that measures time to the mind. The succession of ideas is in all cases exceedingly rapid, and it is by no means clear that it can be accelerated. We find it impracticable in the experiment to retain any idea in our minds unvaried for any perceptible duration. Continual flux appears to take place in every part of the universe. It is perhaps a law of our nature, that thoughts shall at all times succeed to each other with equal rapidity. Yet time seems to our apprehension to flow now with a precipitated and now with a tardy course. The indolent man reclines for hours in the shade; and, though his mind be perpetually at work, the silent lapse of duration is unobserved. But, when acute pain or uneasy expectation obliges consciousness

Duration measured by consciousness

to recur with unusual force, the time then appears insupportably long. Indeed it is a contradiction in terms to suppose that the succession of thoughts, where there is nothing that perceptibly links them together, where they totally elude or instantly vanish from the memory, can be a measure of time to the mind. That there is such a state of mind in some cases assuming a permanent form, has been so much the general opinion of mankind, that it

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

has obtained a name, and is called reverie. It is probable from what has been said that thoughts of reverie, understanding by that appellation thoughts untransmitted to the memory, perpetually take their turn with our more express and digested thoughts, even in the most active scenes of our life.

Lastly, thought may be the source of animal motion, and yet there may be no need of a distinct thought producing each individual motion. This is a very important point in the subject before us. In uttering a cry for example, the number of muscles and articulations of the body concerned in this operation is very great; shall we say that the infant has a distinct thought for each motion of these articulations?

3. a distinct thought to each motion may be unnecessary

The answer to this question will be considerably facilitated, if we recollect the manner in which the impressions are blended, which we receive from external objects. The sense of feeling is diffused over every part of my body, I feel the different substances that support me, the pen I guide, various affections and petty irregularities in different parts of my frame, nay, the very air that environs me. But all these impressions are absolutely

apparent from the complexity of sensible impressions

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII.

simultaneous, and I can have only one perception at once. Out of these various impressions, the most powerful, or that which has the greatest advantage to solicit my attention, overcomes and drives out the rest; or, which not less frequently happens, some idea of association suggested by the last preceding idea wholly withdraws my attention from every external object. It is probable however that this perception is imperceptibly modified by the miniature impressions that accompany it, just as we actually find that the very same ideas presented to a sick man, take a peculiar tinge, that renders them exceedingly different from what they are in the mind of a man in health. It has been already shown, that, though there is nothing less frequent than the apprehending of a simple idea, yet every idea, however complex, offers itself to the mind under the conception of unity. The blending of numerous impressions into one perception is a law of our nature, and the customary train of our perceptions is entirely of this denomination. Mean while it deserves to be remarked by the way, that, at the very time that the most methodical series of perceptions is going on in the mind, there is another set of perceptions, or rather many sets playing an under or intermediate part; and, though these perpetually modify each other, yet the manner in which it is done is in an eminent degree minute and unobserved.

These remarks furnish us with an answer to the long disputed question, whether the mind always thinks? It appears that innumerable impressions are perpetually made upon our body, and the only way, in which the slightest of these is prevented from conveying a distinct report to the mind, is in consequence

BOOK IV. CHAP. VII. The mind always thinks

of its being overpowered by some more considerable impression. It cannot therefore be alledged, "that, as one impression is found to be overpowered by another while we wake, the strongest only of the simultaneous impressions furnishing an idea to the mind; so the whole set of simultaneous impressions during sleep may be overpowered by some indisposition of the sensorium, and entirely fail of its effect." For, first, the

cases are altogether different. From the explication above given it appeared, that not one of the impressions was really lost, but tended, though in a very limited degree, to modify the predominant impression. Secondly, nothing can be more unintelligible than this indisposition. Were it of the nature which the objection requires, sleep ought to cease of its own accord after the expiration of a certain term, but to be incapable of interruption from any experiment I might make upon the sleeper. To what purpose call or shake him? Shall we say, that it requires an impression of a certain magnitude to excite the sensorium? But a clock shall strike in the room and not wake him, when a voice of a much lower key produces that effect. What is the precise degree of magnitude necessary? We actually find the ineffectual calls that are addressed to us, as well as various other sounds, occasionally mixing with our dreams, without our being aware from whence this new perception arose.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VII.

To apply these observations. If a number of impressions may come blended to the mind, so as to make up one thought or perception, why may not one thought, in cases where the mind acts as a cause, produce a variety of motions? It has already been shown that there is no essential difference between the two cases. The mind is completely passive in both. Is there any sufficient reason to show, that, though it be possible for one substance considered as the recipient of effects to be the subject of a variety of simultaneous impressions, yet it is impossible for one substance considered as a cause to produce a variety of simultaneous motions? If it be granted that there is not, if the mere modification of a thought designing a motion in chief, may produce a secondary motion, then it must perhaps farther be confessed possible for that modification which my first thought produced in my second, to carry on the motion, even though the second thought be upon a subject altogether different.

The consequences, which seem deducible from this theory of mind, are sufficiently memorable. By showing the extreme subtlety and simplicity of thought, it removes many of the difficulties that might otherwise rest upon its finer and more evanescent operations. If thought, in order to be the cause of animal motion, need not have either the nature of volition, or the concomitant of consciousness, and if a single thought may become a complex cause and produce a variety of motions, it will then become exceedingly difficult to trace its operations, or to discover any circumstances in a particular instance of animal motion, which can sufficiently indicate that thought was not the principle of its production, and by that means supersede the force of the general arguments adduced in the beginning of this chapter. Hence therefore it appears that all those motions which are observed to exist in substances having perception, and which are not to be discovered in substances of any other species, may reasonably be suspected to have thought, the distinguishing peculiarity of such substances, for their cause.

Conclusion

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VII.

There are various classes of motion which will fall under this definition, beside those already enumerated. An example of one of these classes suggests itself in the phenomenon of walking. An attentive observer will perceive various symptoms calculated to persuade him, that every step he takes during the

The theory applied to
the phenomenon of
walking

longest journey is the production of thought. Walking is in all cases originally a voluntary motion. In a child when he learns to walk, in a rope dancer when he begins to practise that particular exercise, the distinct determination of mind preceding each step is sufficiently perceptible. It may be absurd to say, that a long series of motions can be the result of so many express volitions, when these supposed volitions leave no trace in the memory. But it is not unreasonable to believe, that a species of motion which began in express design, may, though it ceases to be the subject of conscious attention, owe its continuance to a continued series of thoughts flowing in that direction, and that, if life were taken away, material impulse would not carry on the exercise for a moment. We actually find, that, when our thoughts in a train are more than commonly earnest, our pace slackens, and sometimes our going forward is wholly suspended, particularly in any less common species of walking, such as that of descending a flight of stairs. In ascending the case is still more difficult, and accordingly we are accustomed wholly to suspend the regular progress of reflection during that operation.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VII.

Another class of motions of a still subtler nature, are the regular motions of the animal economy, such as the circulation of the blood, and the pulsation of the heart. Are thought and perception the medium of these motions? We have the same argument here as in the former instances, conjunction of event. When thought begins, these motions also begin; and, when it ceases, they are at an end. They are therefore either the cause or effect of percipiency, or mind; but we shall be inclined to embrace the latter side of this dilemma, when we recollect that we are probably acquainted with many instances in which thought is the immediate cause of motions, which scarcely yield in subtlety to these; but that, as to the origin of thought, we are wholly uninformed. Add to this, that there are probably no motions of the animal economy, which we do not find it in the power of volition, and still more of our involuntary sensations, to hasten or retard.

to the circulation of
the blood

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VII.

It is far from certain that the phenomenon of motion can any where exist where there is not thought. Motion may be distributed into four classes; the simpler motions which result from what are called the essential properties of matter and the laws of impulse; the more complex ones which cannot be accounted for by the assumption of these laws, such as gravitation, elasticity, electricity and magnetism; and the motions of the vegetable and animal systems. Each of these seems farther than that which preceded it from being able to be accounted for by any thing we understand of the nature of matter.

Of motion in general

Some light may be derived from what has been here advanced upon the phenomenon of dreams. "In sleep we sometimes imagine" for example "that we read long passages from books, or hear a long oration from a speaker. In all cases scenes and incidents pass before us that in various ways excite our passions and interest our feelings. Is it possible that these should be the unconscious production of our own minds?"

Of dreams

It has already appeared, that volition is the accidental, and by no means the necessary concomitant, even of those thoughts which are most active and efficient in the producing of motion.

It is therefore no more to be wondered at that the mind should be busied in the composition of books which it appears to read, than that a train of thoughts of any other kind should pass through it without a consciousness of its being the author. In fact we perpetually annex wrong and erroneous ideas to this phrase, that we are the authors. Though mind be a real and efficient cause, it is in no case a first cause. It is the medium through which operations are produced. Ideas succeed each other in our sensorium according to certain necessary laws. The most powerful impression, either from without or from within, constantly gets the better of all its competitors, and forcibly drives out the preceding thought, till it is in the same irresistible manner driven out by its successor.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VII.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. VIII.

OF THE PRINCIPLE OF VIRTUE

hypotheses of benevolence and self love—superiority of the former.—action is either voluntary or involuntary.—nature of the first of these classes.—argument that results from it.—voluntary action has a real existence; consequence of that existence.—experimental view of the subject.—suppositions suggested by the advocates of self love—that we calculate upon all occasions the advantage to accrue to us.—falseness of this supposition.—supposition of a contrary sort.—we do not calculate what would be the uneasiness to result from our refraining to act—either in relieving distress—or in adding to the stock of general good.—uneasiness an accidental member of the process.—the suppositions inconsistently blended.—scheme of self love recommended from the propensity of mind to abbreviate its process—from the simplicity that obtains in the natures of things.—hypothesis of self love incompatible with virtue.—conclusion.—importance of the question.—application.

THE subject of intellectual mechanism suggested itself as the most suitable introduction to an enquiry into the moral principles of human conduct. Having first ascertained that thought is the real and efficient source of animal motion, it remains to be considered what is the nature of those particular thoughts in which the moral conduct of man originates.

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII.

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII.

Upon this question there are two opinions. By some it is supposed that the human mind is of a temper considerably ductile, so that, as we in certain instances evidently propose our own advantage for the object of our pursuit, so we are capable no less sincerely and directly in other instances of desiring the benefit of our neighbour. By others it is affirmed, that we are incapable of acting but from the prospect or stimulant of personal advantage, and that, when our conduct appears most retrograde from this object, the principle from which it flows is secretly the same. It shall be the business of this chapter to prove that the former hypothesis is conformable to truth.

Hypotheses of benevolence and self love.

Superiority of the former

It is to be presumed from the arguments of the preceding chapter, that there exist in the theory of the human mind two classes of action, voluntary and involuntary. The last of these we have minutely investigated. It has sufficiently appeared that there are certain motions of the animal system, which have sensation or thought for their medium of production, and at the same time arise, to have recourse to a usual mode of expression, spontaneously, without foresight of or a direct reflecting on the result which is to follow. But, if we admit the existence of this phenomenon, there does not

Action is either voluntary or involuntary

seem less reason to admit the existence of the other class of action above enumerated, which is accompanied in its operation with a foresight of its result, and to which that foresight serves as the reason and cause of existence.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VIII.

Voluntary action cannot proceed from all perceptions indiscriminately, but only from perceptions of a peculiar class, viz. such perceptions as are accompanied with the idea of something as true respecting them, something which may be affirmed or denied. One of the first inferences therefore from the doctrine of voluntary action, is the existence of the understanding as a faculty distinct from sensation, or, to speak more accurately, the possibility of employing the general capacity of perception, not merely as the vehicle of distinct ideas, but as the medium of connecting two or more ideas together. This particular habit, when it has once been created, gradually extends itself to every province of the mind, till at length it is impossible for any thing to make a clear and distinct impression upon the sensorium, without its being followed with some judgment of the mind concerning it.

Nature of the first of
these classes

It is thus that man becomes a moral being. He is no farther so than he is capable of connecting and comparing ideas, of making propositions concerning them, and of foreseeing certain consequences as the result of certain motions of the animal system.

But, if the foresight of certain consequences to result may be the sufficient reason of action, that is, if there be such a thing as volition, then every foresight of that kind has a tendency to action. If the perception of something as true, joined with the consciousness of my capacity to act upon this truth, be of itself sufficient to produce motion in the animal system, then every perception so accompanied has a tendency to motion. To apply this to the subject before us.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VIII.

I perceive a certain agreeable food, I perceive in myself an appetite which this food is adapted to gratify, and these perceptions are accompanied with a consciousness of my power to appropriate this food. If no other consideration exist in my mind beyond those which have just been stated, a certain motion of the animal system irresistibly follows.

Argument that results
from it

Suppose now that the person about whose appetites these propositions are conversant, is not myself but another. This variation cannot materially alter the case. Still there remain all the circumstances necessary to generate motion. I perceive the food, I am acquainted with the wants of the person in question, and I am conscious of my power of administering to them. Nothing more is necessary in order to produce a certain movement of my body. Therefore, if, as in the former case, no other consideration exist in my mind, a certain motion of the animal system irresistibly follows. Therefore, if ten thousand other considerations exist, yet there was in this, separately considered, a tendency to motion. That which, when alone, must inevitably produce motion, must, however accompanied, retain its internal character.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VIII.

Let us however suppose, which seems the only consistent mode of supporting the doctrine of self love, “that there is no such thing practically considered as volition, that man never acts from a foresight of consequences, but always continues to act, as we have proved him to act at first, from the mere impulse of pain, and precisely in the manner to which that impulse prompts him, without the rational faculty having any tendency to prolong, to check or to regulate his actions.” What an incredible picture does this exhibit to us of the human mind? We form to ourselves, for this cannot be disputed, opinions, we measure the tendency of means to the promotion of ends, we compare the value of different objects, and we imagine our conduct to be influenced by the judgments we are induced to make. We perceive the preferableness of one thing to another, we desire, we chuse; all this cannot be denied. But all this is a vain apparatus; and the whole system of our conduct proceeds, uninfluenced by our apprehension of the relative value of objects, and our foresight of consequences favourable or adverse.

Voluntary action has a real existence

There is no other alternative. Once admit the understanding to an efficient share in the business, and there is no reason that can possibly be assigned, why every topic, which is the object of human understanding, should not have its portion of efficiency. Once admit that we act upon the apprehension of something that may be affirmed or denied respecting an idea, and we shall be compelled to acknowledge that every proposition including in it the notion of preferableness or the contrary, of better or worse, will, so far as it falls within the compass of our power real or supposed to effect, afford a motive inducing, though with different degrees of energy, to animal motion. But this is directly contrary to the theory of self love. They who maintain that self love is the only spring of action, say in effect, not only that no action is disinterested, but that no disinterested consideration contributes in any degree as an inducement to action. If I relieve the virtuous distress of the best of men, I am influenced according to them by no particle of love for the individual or compassion for his distress, but exclusively by the desire of procuring gratification to myself.

Consequence of that existence

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII.

Let us consider this case a little more closely. If I perceive either that my prosperity or existence must be sacrificed to those of twenty men as good as myself, or theirs to mine, surely this affords some small inducement to adopt the former part of the alternative. It may not be successful, but does it excite no wish however fleeting, no regret however ineffectual? The decision of the question is in reality an affair of arithmetic; is there no human being that was ever competent to understand it? The value of a man is his usefulness; has no man ever believed that another's capacity for usefulness was equal to his own? I am as 40, consequently the others are as 800; if the 40 were not myself, I should perceive that it was less than 800; is it possible I should not perceive it, when the case becomes my own?

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII.

But the advocates for the system of self love generally admit, “that it is possible for a man to sacrifice his own existence in order to preserve that of twenty others;” but they affirm, “that in so doing he acts from personal interest. He perceives that it is better for him to die with the consciousness of an heroic action, than live with the remorse

of having declined it.” That is, here is an action attended with various recommendations, the advantage to arise to twenty men, their tranquillity and happiness through a long period of remaining existence, the benefits they will not fail to confer on thousands of their contemporaries, and through them on millions of posterity, and lastly his own escape from remorse and momentary exultation in the performance of an act of virtue. From all these motives he selects the last, the former he wholly disregards, and adopts a conduct of the highest generosity from no view but to his own advantage. Abstractedly and impartially considered, and putting self as such out of the question, this is its least recommendation, and he is absolutely and unlimitedly callous to all the rest.

Considering then the system of disinterestedness as sufficiently established in theory, let us compare it with the lessons of experience. There are two different hypotheses by which this theory is opposed; the one affirming “that in every thing we do, we employ, previously to the choice of the mind, a calculation by which we determine how far the thing to be done will conduce to our own advantage;” the other ascribing our actions “to the same blind and unintelligent principle, by which, when a child cries, he frequently utters a sound unexpected by himself, but which inevitably results from a certain connexion of an organized body with an irritated mind.”

Experimental view of the subject.

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII. Suppositions suggested by the advocates of self love:

How far does experience agree with the first of these hypotheses? Surely nothing can be more contrary to any thing we are able to observe of ourselves, than to imagine, that in every act, of pity suppose, we estimate the quantity of benefit to arise to ourselves, before we yield to the emotion. It might be said indeed, that the mind is very subtle in its operations, and that, a certain train of reasoning having been rendered familiar to us, we pass it over in our reflections with a rapidity that leaves no trace in the memory. But this, though true, will contribute little to relieve the system we are considering, since it unfortunately happens that our first emotions of pity are least capable of being accounted for in this way.

that we calculate upon all occasions the advantage to accrue to us

To understand this let us begin with the case of an infant. Before he can feel sympathy, he must have been led by a series of observations to perceive that his nurse for example, is a being possessed of consciousness, and susceptible like himself of the impressions of pleasure and pain. Having supplied him with this previous knowledge, let us suppose his nurse to fall from a flight of stairs and break her leg. He will probably feel some concern for the accident; he will understand the meaning of her cries, similar to those he has been accustomed to utter in distress; and he will discover some wish to relieve her. Pity is perhaps first introduced by a mechanical impression upon the organs, in consequence of which the cries uttered by another prompt the child without direct design to utter cries of his own. These are at first unaccompanied with compassion, but they naturally induce the mind of the infant to yield attention to the appearance which thus impressed him.

Falseness of this supposition

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII.

In the relief he wishes to communicate is he prompted by reflecting on the pleasures of generosity? This is by the supposition the first benevolent emotion he has experienced, and previously to experience it is impossible he should foresee the pleasures of benevolence. Shall we suppose that he is influenced by other selfish considerations? He considers, that, if his nurse die, he will be in danger of perishing; and that, if she be lame, he will be deprived of his airings. Is it possible that any man should believe, that, in the instantaneous impulse of sympathy, the child is guided by these remote considerations? Indeed it was unnecessary to have instanced in an action apparently benevolent, since it is equally clear that our most familiar actions are inconsistent with this explanation. We do not so much as eat and drink, from the recollection that these functions are necessary to our support.

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII.

The second of the two hypotheses enumerated, is diametrically the reverse of the first. As the former represented all human actions as proceeding from a very remote deduction of the intellect, the latter considers the whole as merely physical. In its literal sense, as has already been seen, nothing can be more incompatible with experience. Its advocates therefore are obliged to modify their original assumption, and to say, not that we act merely from sensation, but that sensation affords the basis for reflection; and that, though we be capable of conducting ourselves by system and foresight, yet the only topic to which we can apply that foresight is the removal of pain. In reality all that which is regularly adapted to the accomplishment of a certain purpose, must be admitted to flow from the dictates of reflection. The tear starts, the cry is uttered at the prompting of sensation only, but we cannot lift a finger to relieve except as we are commanded by the understanding.

Supposition of a contrary sort.

Here then we are presented with the commencement of a new series. If uneasiness be still the source of the phenomena, at least it is now under a different form. Before, a certain emotion was produced, respecting which no intention was extant in the mind. Now an action or a series of actions is adopted with a certain view and leading to a certain end. This end is said to be the removal of uneasiness. Whether it be or no is a question which recollection in many cases is competent to enable us to decide. If we frequently deceive ourselves as to the motive by which we are prompted to act, this is chiefly owing to vanity, a desire of imputing to ourselves, or being understood by the world to act from a principle more elevated than that which truly belongs to us. But this idea is least prevalent with children and savages, and of consequence they ought to be most completely aware that the project they have conceived is that of removing uneasiness. It seems to be an uncommon refinement in absurdity to say, that the end we really pursue is one to which we are in no instance conscious; that our action is wholly derived from an unperceived influence, and the view extant in the understanding altogether impotent and unconcerned.

We do not calculate what would be the uneasiness to result from our refraining to act:

either in relieving distress:

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII.

In the case we have just examined uneasiness is the first step

in the process; in others which might be stated uneasiness is not the first step. "In the pursuit" suppose "of a chemical process I accidentally discover a circumstance, which may be of great benefit to mankind. I instantly quit the object I was originally pursuing, prosecute this discovery, and communicate it to the world." In the former proceeding a sensation of pain was the initiative, and put my intellectual powers into action. In the present case the perception of truth is the original mover. Whatever uneasiness may be supposed to exist, rendering me anxious for the publication of this benefit, is the consequence of the perception. The uneasiness would never have existed if the perception had not gone before it.

or in adding to the stock of general good.

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII.

But it has been said, "that, though the perception of truth in this case goes first, the pain was not less indispensable in the process, since, without that, action would never have followed. Action is the child of desire, and a cold and uninteresting decision of the understanding would for ever have lain dormant in the mind." Granting that pain in a certain modified degree is a constant step in the process, it may nevertheless be denied that it is in the strictest sense of the word indispensable. To perceive that I ought to publish a certain discovery, is to perceive that publishing is preferable to not publishing it. But to perceive a preference is to prefer, and to prefer is to choose. The process is in this case complete, and pain, in the sense in which it comes in at all, is merely an accident. Why do I feel pain in the neglect of an act of benevolence, but because benevolence is judged by me to be a conduct which it becomes me to adopt? Does the understanding wait to enquire what advantage will result from the propositions, that two and two make four, or that such and such causes will contribute to the happiness of my neighbour, before it is capable of perceiving them to be true?

Uneasiness an accidental member of the process.

The same principle which is applied here, is not less applicable to fame, wealth and power, in a word to all those pursuits which engage the reflecting and speculative part of the civilised world. None of these objects would ever have been pursued, if the decisions of the intellect had not gone first, and informed us that they were worthy to be pursued.

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII.

Neither of the two hypotheses we have been examining would perhaps have been reckoned so much as plausible in themselves, if they had not been blended together by the inadvertence of their supporters. The advocates of self love have been aware, that the mere sensitive impulse of pain would account for a very small part of the history of man; and they have therefore insensibly elided from the consideration of uneasiness to be removed, to that of interest to be promoted. They have confounded the two cases of sensation and reflection; and, taking it for granted in the latter that private gratification was the object universally pursued, have concluded that they were accounting for all human actions from one principle. In reality no two principles can be more distinct, than the impulse of uneasiness, which has very improperly been denominated the love of ourselves, and that deliberate self love, by which of set design we pursue our own advantage. One circumstance only they have in common, that of representing us as incapable of understanding any proposition, till we have in some way or other connected it with personal interest. This is certainly a just

The suppositions inconsistently blended

representation of their consequences; since, if I were capable of understanding the naked proposition, that my neighbour stood in need, of a candle for instance to be removed from one end of a room to the other, this would be a reason of action, a motive, either strong or weak, either predominant or the contrary. But, if this consideration entered for any thing into the ground of my proceeding, the whole would not be resolvable into self love.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VIII.

An hypothesis, which has been thought to have some tendency to relieve the difficulties of the system of self love, is that “of the mind's reasoning out for itself certain general principles, which are a sort of resting-places in the process, to which it afterwards recurs, and upon which it acts, without being at the trouble in each instance of application, of repeating the reasons upon which the general principle was founded. Thus in geometry, as we proceed to the higher branches, we perpetually refer to the earlier propositions as established and certain, without having at the time in our minds perhaps the smallest recollection of the way in which those early propositions were demonstrated.” But this representation, though true, has very little tendency to decide in the subject before us. It is still true, that, if I be capable of understanding a proposition as it relates to the interest of my neighbour, any reasoning about the proposition by which it is indirectly connected with my own interest, is unnecessary to put me into a state of action. It is still true, that my action has a direct and an indirect tendency; and, till it can be shown that there is something in the nature of mind that unfits it for entertaining the direct purpose, an unprejudiced enquirer will be very little disposed universally to have recourse to that which is indirect.

Scheme of self love recommended from the propensity of mind to abbreviate its process

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VIII.

The hypothesis of self love seems to have been originally invented from a love of “that simplicity, which appears to be the ultimate term in all grand discoveries relative to the system of the universe.” But simplicity, though well deserving our approbation, can scarcely of itself be a sufficient support for any opinion. The simplicity however in this case is more apparent than real. Not to repeat what has been said relative to the coalition of two hypotheses very incongruous in their own nature, there is little genuine simplicity in a scheme, that represents us as perpetually acting from a motive which we least suspected, and seeks by a circuitous and intricate method for a recommendation of little intrinsic value, rejecting in all cases the great and obvious reason which the first view of the subject suggested. True simplicity is altogether on the side of the opposite system, which represents man as capable of being governed by the nature of the thing, and of acting from the motive which he supposes to influence him; which requires nothing but perception to account for all the phenomena of mind, and, when a reason exciting to action is apprehended, does not seek for an additional principle to open a communication between the judgment and the choice.

from the simplicity that obtains in the natures of things

There is one observation more, which, though it be not so conclusive as some of those which have been mentioned, ought not to be omitted. If self love be the only principle of action,

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VIII. Hypothesis of

there can be no such thing as virtue. Virtue is a principle in the mind, by which we are enabled to form a true estimate of the pretensions of different reasons inviting us to preference. He, that makes a false estimate, and prefers a trivial and partial good to an important and comprehensive one, is vicious. It is in the disposition and view of the mind, and not in the good which may accidentally and unintentionally result, that virtue consists. Judas's act in betraying Christ, according to the Christian system, may be regarded as a real and essential cause conducing to the salvation of mankind. Yet Judas's act was not virtuous, but vicious. He thought only of the forty pieces of silver, the price of his treachery, and neglected every consideration of public utility and justice. Just so in the case stated early in the present chapter, the public benefactor, absolutely and strictly speaking, prefers forty to eight hundred or eight hundred millions. So far as relates to the real merits of the case, his own advantage or pleasure is a very insignificant consideration, and the benefit to be produced, suppose to a world, is inestimable. Yet he falsely and unjustly prefers the first, and regards the latter, abstractedly considered, as nothing. If there be such a thing as justice, if I have a real and absolute value, upon which truth can decide, and which can be compared with what is greater or less, then, according to this system, the best action that ever was performed, may, for any thing we know, have been the action in the whole world of the most exquisite and deliberate injustice. Nay, it could not have been otherwise, since it produced the greatest good, and therefore was the individual instance in which the greatest good was most directly postponed to personal gratification.

self love incompatible with virtue

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII.

Nor will this objection be much relieved by the system already alluded to of resting-places, enabling a man in a certain degree to forget the narrow and selfish principles in which his conduct originated. It can scarcely be questioned, that the motives which induced a man to adopt his system of conduct, and without which he never would have adopted it, are of more importance, than the thoughtlessness and inattention by which they are forgotten, in deciding upon the morality of his character.

From this train of reasoning the result is, that men are capable of understanding the beauty of virtue, and the claims of other men upon their benevolence; and, understanding them, that these views, as well as every other perception of the intellect, are of the nature of motives, sometimes overpowered by other considerations, and sometimes overpowering them, but always in their own nature capable of exciting to action, when not counteracted by pleas of a different sort. Men are capable no doubt of preferring an inferior interest of their own to a superior interest of other people; but to this preference it is perhaps necessary, that they should imagine the benefit to themselves to be great and the injury to others comparatively small, or else that they should have embraced the pernicious opinion that the general good is best served by each man's applying himself exclusively to his personal advantage.

Conclusion

BOOK IV. CHAP. VIII.

There is no doctrine in which the generous and elevated mind rests with more satisfaction, than in that of which we are treating.

Importance of the question

If it be false, it is no doubt incumbent upon us to make the best of the small remnant of good that remains. But it is a heartless prospect for the moralist, who, when he has done all, has no hope to persuade mankind to one atom of real affection towards any one individual of their species. We may be made indeed the instruments of good, but in a way less honourable, than that in which a frame of wood or a sheet of paper may be made the instrument of good. The wood or the paper are at least neutral. But we are drawn into the service with affections of a diametrically opposite direction. When we do the most benevolent action, it is with a view only to our own advantage, and with the most sovereign and unreserved neglect of that of others. We are instruments of good, just in the same manner as bad men are said to be the instruments of providence, even when their inclinations are most refractory to its decrees. In this sense we may admire the system of the universe, where public utility results from each man's contempt of that utility, and where the most beneficial actions of those, whom we have been accustomed to term the best men, are only instances in which justice and the real merits of the case are most flagrantly violated. But we can think with little complacency of the individuals of whom this universe is composed. It is no wonder that philosophers, whose system has taught them to look upon their fellow men as thus perverse and unjust, have been frequently cold, phlegmatic and unanimated. It is no wonder that Rousseau, the most benevolent of all these philosophers, and who most escaped the general contagion, has been driven to place the perfection of all virtue in doing no injury.* Neither philosophy nor morality nor politics will ever show like themselves, till man shall be acknowledged for what he really is, a being capable of justice, virtue and benevolence, and who needs not always to be led to a philanthropical conduct by foreign and frivolous considerations.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VIII.

The system of disinterested benevolence proves to us, that it is possible to be virtuous, and not merely to talk of virtue; that all which has been said by philosophers and moralists respecting impartial justice is not an unmeaning rant; and that, when we call upon mankind to divest themselves of selfish and personal considerations, we call upon them for something which they are able to practise. An idea like this reconciles us to our species; teaches us to regard with enlightened admiration the men who have appeared to lose the feeling of their personal existence in the pursuit of general advantage; and gives us reason to expect, that, as men collectively advance in science and useful institution, they will proceed more and more to consolidate their private judgment and their individual will with abstract justice and the unmixed approbation of general happiness.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VIII.

What are the inferences that ought to be made from this doctrine with respect to political institution? Certainly not that the interest of the individual ought to be made incompatible with the part he is expected to take in the interest of the whole. This is neither desirable, nor even possible. But that social institution needs not despair of seeing men influenced by other and better motives. The legislator is bound to recollect that the true perfection of mind consists in disinterestedness. He should regard it as the ultimate object of his exertions, to induce men to estimate themselves at their true value, and neither to grant to themselves nor claim from others a higher consideration than they justly deserve. Above all he should

Application

be careful not to add to the vigour of the selfish passions. He should gradually wean men from contemplating their own benefit in all that they do, and induce them to view with complacency the advantage that is to result to others.

The last perfection of this feeling consists in that state of mind which bids us rejoice as fully in the good that is done by others, as if it were done by ourselves. The truly wise man will

be actuated neither by interest nor ambition, the love of honour nor the love of fame. He has no emulation. He is not made uneasy by a comparison of his own attainments with those of others, but by a comparison with the standard of right. He has a duty indeed obliging him to seek the good of the whole; but that good is his only object. If that good be effected by another hand, he feels no disappointment. All men are his fellow labourers, but he is the rival of no man. Like Pedareus in ancient story, he exclaims: "I also have endeavoured to deserve; but there are three hundred citizens in Sparta better than myself, and I rejoice."

BOOK IV. CHAP.
VIII.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

CHAP. IX.

OF THE TENDENCY OF VIRTUE

it is the road to happiness—to the esteem and affection of others.—objection from misconstruction and calumny.—answer.—virtue compared with other modes of procuring esteem.—vice and not virtue is the subject of obloquy; instanced in the base alloy with which our virtues are mixed—in arrogance and ostentation—in the vices in which persons of moral excellence allow themselves.—the virtuous man only has friends.—virtue the road to prosperity and success in the world—applied to commercial transactions—to cases that depend upon patronage.—apparent exceptions where the dependent is employed as the instrument of vice.—virtue compared with other modes of becoming prosperous.—source of the disrepute of virtue in this respect.—concession.—case where convenient vice bids fair for concealment.—chance of detection.—indolence—apprehensiveness—and depravity the offspring of vice.

HAVING endeavoured to establish the theory of virtue upon its true principle, and to shew that self interest is neither its basis in justice and truth, nor by any means necessary to incite us to the practice, it may not be improper to consider in what degree public interest is coincident with private, and by that means at once to remove one of the enticements and apologies of vice, and afford an additional encouragement and direction to the true politician.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IX.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IX.

In the first place then, there appears to be sufficient reason to believe, that the practice of virtue is the true road to individual happiness. Many of the reasons which might be adduced in this place have been anticipated in the chapter of the Cultivation of Truth. Virtue is a source of happiness that does not pall in the enjoyment, and of which no man can deprive us.* The essence of virtue consists in the seeing every thing in its true light, and estimating every thing at its intrinsic value. No man therefore, so far as he is virtuous, can be in danger to become a prey to sorrow and discontent. He will habituate himself, respecting every species of conduct and temper, to look at its absolute utility, and to tolerate none from which benefit cannot arise either to himself or others. Nor will this be so difficult a task as it is commonly imagined. The man, who is accustomed upon every occasion to consult his reason, will speedily find a habit of this nature growing upon him, till the just and dispassionate value of every incident that befalls him will come at length spontaneously to suggest itself. Those evils which prejudice has taught so great a part of mankind to regard with horror, will appear to his understanding disarmed of their terrors. Poverty, obloquy and disgrace will be judged by him to be very trivial misfortunes. Few conditions can be so destitute as to deprive us of the means of

It is the road to
happiness:

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IX.

obtaining for ourselves a subsistence. The reasonable mind perceives at once the possibility of this and the best method of executing it; and it needs no great stretch of understanding to decide, that real happiness does not consist in luxurious accommodations. With respect to obloquy and disgrace, the wise man may lament the tendency they possess to narrow the sphere of his usefulness; but he will readily perceive, that, separately from this consideration, they are no evils. My real value depends upon the qualities that are properly my own, and cannot be diminished by the slander and contempt of the whole world. Even bodily pain loses much of its sting, when it is encountered by a chearful, a composed, and a determined spirit. To all these negative advantages of virtue, we may add the positive satisfaction of a mind conscious of rectitude, rejoicing in the good of the whole, and perpetually exerted for the promotion of that good.

There are indeed some extreme cases of the election of a virtuous conduct, respecting which it is difficult to pronounce. Was it Regulus's interest to return to Carthage to a tormenting death, rather than save his life by persuading the Roman senate to an exchange of prisoners? Probably it was. Probably, with the exquisite feeling of duty with which Regulus was animated, a life that was to be perpetually haunted with the recollection of his having omitted the noblest opportunity of public service, was not worth his purchase. His reasoning, so far as related to personal interest, might be like that of Cato in the play:

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IX.

“A day, an hour, of virtuous liberty
Is worth a whole eternity in bondage*.”

Secondly, virtue not only leads to the happiness of him who practises it, but to the esteem and affection of others. Nothing can be more indisputable, than that the direct road to the esteem of mankind, is by doing things worthy of their esteem. The most artful scheme for passing things upon others for somewhat different from what they really are, is in momentary danger of detection; and it would be an egregious mistake to suppose, that men esteem any thing but what comes to them under the appearance of virtue. No man ever existed of a taste so depraved as to feel real approbation of another, for the artfulness of his flattery, or the cunning with which he over-reached his neighbours.

to the esteem and
affection of others

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IX.

There is indeed one disadvantage that occurs under this head, consisting in this circumstance, “that no man truly admires what he does not understand. Now, in order thoroughly to comprehend the value of any mental effort, whether of a purely intellectual or moral nature, it is perhaps necessary that the genius or virtue of the spectator should be equal to that of him by whom it is made. It is an inevitable law of our nature, that we should in a great measure judge of others by ourselves, and form our standard of human nature by an investigation of our own minds. That, respecting which we feel a clear and distinct conviction that we are ourselves incapable, we are prone to suspect to be mere show and deception in others. We are the more inclined to this, because we

Objection from
misconstruction and
calumny

feel their virtues to be a reproach to our indolence, and therefore are little disposed to make a liberal estimate of them.”

But, though there be some truth in these observations, they have frequently been made much too indiscriminate, by the misanthropy and impatience of those, who have conceived their estimation with their neighbours or the world to fall greatly short of their merit. It must be admitted that mankind are reluctant to acknowledge a wisdom or a virtue superior to their own; but this reluctance is by no means invincible. It is absurd to suppose that no man believes himself the inferior of his neighbour, or that, when he reads the plays of Shakespeare, the philosophy of Rousseau, or the actions of Cato, he says, “I am as skilful, as wise, or as virtuous as this man.” It would be still more absurd to suppose that men may not in a considerable degree perceive the beauty of passages they could never have written, and actions they would never have performed.

Answer

BOOK IV. CHAP. IX.

It is true that men of high moral excellence are seldom estimated at their true value, especially by their contemporaries. But the question does not relate to this point, but to that other, whether they be not esteemed more than persons of any other description, and of consequence whether virtue be not the best road to esteem? Now, let a specious appearance be maintained with ever so much uniformity of success, it is perpetually in danger of detection. It will always want something of animation, of consistency and firmness that true virtue would produce. The imitation will never come up to the life. That temporising and compliance, which are careful not to contradict too much the prejudices of mankind, and in which the principal advantage of a merely exterior virtue consists, will always bear something suspicious about them. Men do not love him who is perpetually courting their applause. They do not give with a liberal spirit what is sought with too unwearied an assiduity. But their praise

Virtue compared with other modes of procuring esteem

is involuntarily extorted, by him who is not so anxious to obtain success, as to deserve it.

BOOK IV. CHAP. IX.

If men of virtue be frequently misinterpreted or misunderstood, this is in a great degree to be ascribed to the imperfection of their virtue and the errors of their conduct. True virtue should hold no commerce with art. We ought not to be so desirous to exhibit our virtue to advantage, as to give it free scope and suffer it to exhibit itself. Art is nearly allied to selfishness; and true virtue has already been shown to be perfectly disinterested. The mind should be fixed only on the object pursued, and not upon the gracefulness or gallantry of the pursuit. We should be upon all occasions perfectly ingenuous, expressing with simplicity the sentiments of our heart, and speaking of ourselves, when that may be necessary, neither with ostentation and arrogance on the one hand, nor with the frequently applauded lies of a cowardlike humility on the other. There is a charm in sincerity that nothing can resist. If once a man could be perfectly frank, open and firm in all his words and actions, it would be impossible for that man to be misinterpreted.

Vice and not virtue is the subject of obloquy:

instanced in the base alloy with which our virtues are mixed:

Another fruitful source of misrepresentation has appeared to be envy. But, if we be regarded with envy, it may be suspected to be in a great measure our own fault. He will always be envied most, who is most arrogant, and whose mind most frequently recurs to his own attainments and the inferiority

in arrogance and ostentation:

of others. Our virtues would seldom be contemplated with an uneasy sense of reproach, if they were perfectly unassuming.

BOOK IV. CHAP. IX.

Any degree of ostentation in their less corrupted neighbour, as it humbles the vanity of mankind, must be expected to excite in them a desire of retaliation. But he whose virtues flow from philanthropy alone, whose heart expands with benevolence and good will, and who has no desire to make his superiority felt, will at all times have many friends and few enemies.

Virtue has also frequently been subject to misrepresentation from a farther circumstance which is most properly chargeable upon the sufferers, and that is, the inequality of their actions. It is no wonder, if we first rouse the angry passions of mankind by our arrogance, and then render our motives suspected by a certain mixture of art in the exhibition of our characters, that the follies and vices we commit, if they be of a glaring kind, should too often furnish a triumphant argument to support against us the accusation of hypocrisy and deceit. It unfortunately happens, that, when men of an ardent spirit fall into error, their errors are inevitably conspicuous. It happens, that men, who have dedicated the flower of their strength to laudable purposes, too often think they have a right to indulge in relaxations unworthy of the energy of their characters. They would surely avoid this fatal mistake, if they duly reflected, that it is not their individual character only that is at stake, but that they

in the vices in which persons of moral excellence allow themselves

are injuring the cause of justice and general good. Prudential and timid virtues, unalloyed with imprudent and thoughtless vices, are best understood by the vulgar. Their reign indeed is short; they triumph only for a day: but that they are transitory is of little avail, while those who are most worthy of lasting esteem, wantonly barter it for gratifications, contemptible in themselves, and fatally important in their effects.

BOOK IV. CHAP. IX.

are injuring the cause of justice and general good. Prudential and timid virtues, unalloyed with imprudent and thoughtless vices, are best understood by the vulgar. Their reign indeed is short; they triumph only for a day: but that they are transitory is of little avail, while those who are most worthy of lasting esteem, wantonly barter it for gratifications, contemptible in themselves, and fatally important in their effects.

But to return to the comparison between the esteem and affection that accrue from virtue, and from any other plan of conduct. The produce in the latter case must always be in a considerable degree barren, and of very short duration. Whether the good name acquired by virtue be more or less, virtue will appear in the end to be the only mode for its acquisition.

The virtuous man only has friends

He who merits the esteem of his neighbours and fellow citizens, will at least be understood by a few. Instances might be adduced in which persons instigated by the purest motives have been eminently unpopular. But there is perhaps no instance in which such men have not had a few friends of tried and zealous attachment. There is no friendship but this. No man was ever attached to an individual but for the good qualities he ascribed to him; and the degree of attachment will always bear some proportion to the eminence of the qualities. Who would ever have redeemed the life of a knave at the expence of his own? And how many instances do there occur of such heroic friendship where the character was truly illustrious?

In the third place, virtue will probably be found the securest road to outward prosperity and success in the world, according to the old maxim, "that honesty is the best policy." It is indeed natural to suppose that a good name should eminently contribute to our success. This is evident even in the humblest walks of life. That tradesman, other things equal, will always

BOOK IV. CHAP. IX. Virtue the road to prosperity and success in the world:

be most prosperous, who is most fair and equitable in his dealings. Which is most likely to succeed, he who never gives expectations that he cannot fulfil, or who is perpetually

applied to commercial transactions:

disappointing his customers? he who is contented with a reasonable profit, or who is ever upon the watch to outwit those with whom he deals? he who puts one constant price upon his commodities, or who takes whatever he can get, favouring a suspicious customer unreasonably, and extorting with merciless avarice from an easy one? in a word, he who wishes to keep the persons with whom he is concerned in present good humour, or who would give them permanent satisfaction?

There is no doubt, that, though the former may obtain by his artifices a momentary success, the latter will in the sequel be generally preferred. Men are not so blind to their own interest as they have sometimes been represented, and they will soon feel the advantage of dealing with the person upon whom they can depend. We do not love to be perpetually upon our guard against an enemy, and for ever prying into the tricks and subterfuges of a depraved heart.

But what shall we say to those cases in which advancement depends upon patronage? There are two circumstances under this head which seem to form an exception to the rule above delivered. The first is that of a patron, whose vicious and imperfect character renders the co-operation of vicious men necessary to his pursuits, whom therefore he will be contented to reward, even while he despises. The second is that of an office, and it is to be feared such offices exist, which may require a compliant and corrupt character in the person who is to fill it, and for the obtaining of which vice of a certain sort is a necessary recommendation.

BOOK IV. CHAP. IX. to cases that depend upon patronage.

Apparent exception where the dependent is employed as the instrument of vice

It must no doubt be admitted as to this subject in general, that, so far as relates to success in the world, vicious men will often prove fortunate. But it may reasonably be questioned, whether vice be in the first instance the most likely road to fortune. The

Virtue compared with other modes of becoming prosperous

candidates for this equivocal species of preferment may be numerous. An individual cannot distinguish himself in the crowd but by a portion of ability, which it may well be supposed would not have been unsuccessful in the career of virtue. After all, not every candidate, not even every skilful candidate, will be victorious. There is always a struggle in the breast of the patron between contempt and a corrupt motive; and, where there is struggle, the decision will sometimes be on the side which the client least desires. Even when fortune seems to have overtaken him, his situation is still precarious. His success is founded upon a local and mutable basis; his patron may desert him, may be deprived of his power or his

life; and the client, who, after having sacrificed every principle to his hopes of advantage, misses his aim, or is cut short in his career, is in all cases a subject of derision. A bad eminence is always unstable; and, if we could sum up the numbers of those who have sacrificed their virtue to their ambition, we should probably find that a great majority of them had egregiously miscarried in their calculation.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IX.

In the mean time, if we turn to the other side of the estimate, we shall in the first place inevitably suspect that esteem must lead to some of the fruits of esteem. But, exclusively of this consideration, if there be offices for which vice of a certain sort is a necessary qualification, there are also undoubtedly a multitude of offices which cannot be well discharged but by a man of integrity. The patron, though he would perhaps willingly provide for his pander or his parasite at the expence of his country, will not be inclined to trust a man of accommodating principles with the superintendence of his fortune or the education of his child. With the exception of the two cases that have been stated, integrity, as it is the first qualification for discharging a function with propriety, will always occupy a foremost place in the recommendation of the client. The employer, whose object is the real interest of himself, his friends or his country, will have a powerful motive inducing him to prefer the honest candidate. Ability may be almost equally requisite; but ability and virtue, if we should choose to suppose that there is no necessary alliance between them, will at least by no person be thought exclusive of each other. If a knave may in some cases obtain an employment of trust and real importance, it is vehemently to be suspected that this would not have happened, if an honest man of equal ability had been at hand. Add to this that virtue is perpetually gaining ground upon us. The more it is tried, and the more it is known, the more will it be respected. It is to the man of real virtue, whose character is not brought into suspicion by the equivocal nature of some of his proceedings, whose virtue consists in benevolence, equanimity and justice, that all will have recourse, when they have the success of the affair in which they are concerned deeply at heart.

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IX.

Nothing has tended more to bring honesty as an instrument of success into general disrepute, than the sort of complaint that is frequently heard from such as are unsuccessful. These men will naturally have recourse to the most specious topic of self consolation, and there is none that more obviously suggests itself than the supposition that they failed through their too much virtue. Thus the man of rugged temper who is perpetually insulting the foibles of others, the timid man who is incapable of embracing at once a perilous alternative, the scrupulous man who knows not what to admit or reject and is always undetermined upon his course of action, and a thousand others, are forward to impute their miscarriage to their integrity, though strictly speaking it was in every one of these cases to be ascribed to their vices.

Source of the
disrepute of virtue in
this respect

There is another consideration which deserves to be taken into account in this estimate. There is a degree of virtue which would probably render me disinclined to fill many eminent stations, to be a great lawyer, a great senator, or a great minister. The functions of these situations in the present state of mankind are of so equivocal a

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IX. Concession

nature, that a man, whose moral views are in the highest degree sublime, will perhaps find in himself little forwardness to exercise them. He will perhaps conceive that in a private station, unincumbered with engagements, unwarped by the sinister motives that high office will not fail to present, he may render more lasting services to mankind. But surely it is no very formidable objection to say, that honesty will prevent a man from acquiring what he has no wish to acquire.

A case of somewhat a different nature has been suggested, and it has been asked, “Whether honesty be the best road to success, where the violation of it bids fair for perpetual concealment?

Case where
convenient vice bids
fair for concealment

Fortune has led me to the military profession, I lack advancement, but promotions in the army are customarily made by purchase. Thus circumstanced, I find by accident a sum of money, in secreting which I am in little danger of detection, and I apply this sum to purchase me a commission. Should I have more effectually promoted my worldly success by a more scrupulous conduct?”

The answer to this question ought probably to be affirmative.

In the first place we are to consider the chance of detection. The direct tendency of the laws of the material universe is such, as to force the more considerable and interesting actions of human beings into publicity. No man can render himself invisible. The

Chance of detection

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IX.

most artful conspirator cannot sufficiently provide against a thousand petty circumstances, that will lead, if not to conviction, at least to presumption against him. Who is there that would wish to have fastened upon him the suspicion of a base and disingenuous procedure? This feature in human affairs is so remarkable, as to have furnished topics to the literary industry of former centuries, and to have been interpreted God's revenge against the unjust. Suppose that in this case I found the money dropped in a field. Will the owner have no suspicion where he lost it? Will no human being have observed that I was near the spot at the questionable period? The chances are certainly against me, and a mere balance of chance would probably have been sufficient to prove that honesty is the best policy. The bare circumstance of my suddenly possessing a sum of money without visible means of acquiring it, a circumstance to which the attention of my neighbours is always sufficiently alive, would cast an unpleasant stain upon my character. How often has the well contrived train of the politician, triumphing in the inscrutability of his wisdom, been baffled by the most trivial accidents? Since therefore, “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong,” the truest wisdom is to act so as to fear no detection.

There are other circumstances which tend to establish the same proposition. The man, who depends upon his courage, his ability,

BOOK IV. CHAP.
IX. Indolence:

or his amiable character for recommendation, will perpetually cultivate these. His constancy will be unwearied; and, conscious of the integrity of his means, his spirit will be intrepid and erect. The progress of this man, if his ardour be sufficiently great to inspire him with ability, and to render him quick sighted to the detection of his mistakes, will be incessant. But the man who has employed foul

means, will depend partly upon them, and cannot be so fervent in the cultivation of the true. If he always escape detection, he will always fear it, and this will sully the clearness of his spirit. Vice cannot compare with virtue in its tendency to individual happiness. This is not the subject we are considering in this place; but this will apply to our subject. Remorse, uneasiness and confusion of mind are calculated to prevent me from perceiving the true point of projection in my affairs, and detract much from the probability of my rising to eminence in any profession.

apprehensiveness:

Lastly, the man who has once yielded to a dishonest temptation, will yield to it again. He has lost the consistency of character and disdain of vice, which were his firmest securities. He that says, "I will be dishonest now, and dishonest no more," forgets some of the most obvious and characteristic features of the human mind. If he escape suspicion in the first instance, he will only disgrace himself more foully in the second: if the remorse and degradation of spirit arising from one base action could perish, they would be fixed and invigorated by other base actions growing out of the first.

and depravity the offspring of vice

BOOK IV. CHAP. IX.

[*] These remarks will apply to the English writers upon politics in general, from Sydney and Locke to the author of the Rights of Man. The more comprehensive view has been perspicuously treated by Rousseau and Helvetius.

[*] Gulliver's Travels, Part IV. Ch. v.

[*] Locke on Government, Book I. Ch. i. §. 1; and Book II. Ch. vii. §. 91. The words in the last place are: "Wherever any two men are, who have no standing rule and common judge to appeal to on earth for the determination of controversies of right betwixt them, there they are still in *the state of nature*, and under all the inconveniences of it, with only this woeful difference to the subject, &c."

Most of the above arguments may be found much more at large in Burke's Vindication of Natural Society; a treatise, in which the evils of the existing political institutions are displayed with incomparable force of reasoning and lustre of eloquence, while the intention of the author was to shew that these evils were to be considered as trivial.

[*] The arguments of this chapter are for the most part an abstract, the direct ones from Locke on the Human Understanding, those which relate to experience from Hartley's Observations on Man, and those respecting education from the Emile of J. J. Rousseau.

[*] The following passage is extracted from Lord Kaimes, late one of the judges of the kingdom of Scotland.

"Custom-house oaths now a-days go for nothing. Not that the world grows more wicked, but because nobody lays any stress upon them. The duty on French wine is

the same in Scotland and in England. But as we cannot afford to pay this high duty, the permission underhand to pay Spanish duty for French wine, is found more beneficial to the revenue than the rigour of the law. The oath however must be taken that the wine we import is Spanish, to entitle us to the ease of the Spanish duty. Such oaths at first were highly criminal because directly a fraud against the public; but now that the oath is only exacted for form's sake, without any faith intended to be given or received, it becomes very little different from saying in the way of civility, 'I am, sir, your friend, or your obedient servant.'"—Loose Hints upon Education, Appendix, p. 362. Edinburgh, 1781.

Archdeacon Paley in a work, the seventh edition of which lies before me, and which is used as a text book in the university of Cambridge, speaks thus:

“There are falshoods which are not lies; that is, which are not criminal; as—a servant's denying his master, a prisoner's pleading not guilty, an advocate asserting the justice, or his belief of the justice of his client's cause. In such instances no confidence is destroyed, because none was reposed.” Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy, Book III. Part I. Chap. xv. London, 1790.

[*]Logan, Philosophy of History, p. 69.

[*]The majority of instances in the three preceding pages are taken from Hume's Essay on National Characters, where this subject is treated with much ability. Essays, Vol. 1, Part 1, Essay xxi.

[*]Book II. Chap. i. § 1.

[*]Common Sense, p. 1.

[*]This argument respecting gratitude is stated with great clearness in an Essay on the Nature of True Virtue, by the Rev. Jonathan Edwards. 12mo. Dilly.

[*]See this subject more copiously treated in the following chapter.

[*]Vide Appendix to this chapter, No. I.

[*]A spirited outline of these principles is sketched in Swift's Sermon on Mutual Subjection.

[*]“*On a dit—que nous avons tous les mêmes droits. S'ignore ce que c'est que les mêmes droits, où il y a inégalité de talens on de force, & nulle garantie, nulle sanction.*” Raynal, *Revolution d'Amerique*, p. 34.

[*]Rights of Man, page 1.

[*]See Hume's Essays. Part II. Essay xii.

[[dagger](#)]Treatise of Government. Book II. Ch. viii. §. 119, 122.

[*]“Le souveraineté ne peut être représentée, par la même raison qu'elle ne peut être aliénée: elle consiste essentiellement dans la volonté générale, et la volonté ne se représente point: elle est la même, ou elle est autre; il n'y a point de milieu. les députés du peuple ne sont donc point ses représentans, ils ne sont que les commissaires; ils ne peuvent rien conclure définitivement. Toute loi que le peuple en personne n'a pas ratifiée, est nulle; ce n'est point une loi.” *Du Contrat Social*. Liv. III. Chap. XV.

[*]“Dans un état libre, tout homme qui est censé avoir une ame libre, doit être gouverné par lui-même.” *Esprit des Lois*, Liv. XI. Ch. vi.

[†]Sterne's Sermons.—“On a Good Conscience.”

[*]“Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” *Luke*, Ch. XII. Ver. 4.

[*]This was the opinion of the celebrated Mr. Turgot. “He thought that the moral sentiments of mankind might be considerably strengthened, and the perception of them rendered more delicate and precise, either by frequent exercise, or the perpetually subjecting them to the anatomy of a pure and enlightened understanding. For this reason he considered romances as holding a place among treatises of morality, and even as the only books in which he was aware of having seen moral principles treated in an impartial manner.” “M. Turgot pensoit qu'on peut parvenir à fortifier dans les hommes leurs sentimens moraux, à les rendre plus délicats et plus justes, soit par l'exercice de ces sentimens, soit en apprenant à les soumettre à l'analyse d'une raison saine et éclairée. C'est par ce motif qu'il regardoit les romans comme les livres de morales, et même, disoit-il, comme les seuls où il e?t vu de la morale.” *Vie de M. Turgot*, par M. de Condorcet.

[*]These arguments bear some resemblance to those of Mr. Burke. It was not necessary that they should do so precisely, or that we should take advantage of the *argumentum ad hominem* built upon his fervent admiration of the English constitution. Not to say that we shall feel ourselves more at our ease in examining the question generally, than in a personal attack upon this illustrious and virtuous hero of former times.

[*]See Hume's *Essays*. Part II. Essay xii.

[*]See this case more fully discussed in the following chapter.

[*]Book II. chap. ii. p. 83.

[*]This argument, nearly in the words here employed, may be found in Hume's *Essay on Passive Obedience*. *Essays*, Part II, Essay xiii.

[*]“Dans chaque nation il est des momens où les citoyens, incertains du parti qu'ils doivent prendre, et suspendus entre un bon et un mauvais gouvernement, éprouvent la soif de l'instruction, où les esprits, si je l'ose dire, préparés et ameublés peuvent être facilement pénétrés de la rosée de la vérité. Qu'en ce moment un bon ouvrage

paroisse, il put opérer d'heureuse réformes: mais cet instant passe, les citoyens, insensibles à la gloire, sont par la forme de leur gouvernement invinciblement entraînés vers l'ignorance et l'abrutissement. Alors les esprits sont la terre endurcie: l'eau de la vérité y tombe, y coule, mais sans la féconder. Tel est l'état de la France. Cette nation avilie est aujourd'hui le mépris de l'Europe. Nulle crise salutaire ne lui rendra la liberté.” De l'Homme, Préface.

[*]See the Parmenides.

[*]Apologia, Cap. xlvi. See this subject farther pursued in Appendix, No. 1.

[*]*Vie de Voltaire, par M**** (said to be the marquis de Villette). *A Geneve, 1786. Chap. iv.* This is probably the best history of this great man which has yet appeared.

[*]See a particular case of this sincerity discussed in Appendix, No. II.

[*]*Telémaque. Liv. XVI.*

[†]*Liv. III.*

[*]“Plus les hommes seront éclairés, plus ils seront libres. - Mais n'avertissons point les oppresseurs de former une ligue contre la raison, cachons leur l'étroite et nécessaire unions des lumières et de la liberté. - Quel sera donc le devoir d'un philosophe? - Il éclairera les gouvernemens sur tout ce qu'ils ont à craindre des prêtres. - Ils sera voir que sans la liberté de penser le même esprit dans la clergé ramènerait les mêmes assassinats, les mêmes supplices, les mêmes proscriptions, les mêmes guerres civiles. - Au lieu de montrer que la superstition est l'appui du despotisme, avant que la raison ait rassemblé assez de force, il prouvera qu'elle est l'ennemie des rois. - Tel est l'esprit de tous les ouvrages de Voltaire. - Que des hommes, inferieurs à lui, ne voyent pas que si Voltaire e?t fait autrement, ni Montesquieu ni Rousseau n'auraient pu écrire leurs ourvages, que l'Europe serait encore superstitieuses, et resterait long-tems esclave. - En attaquant les oppresseurs avant d'avoir éclairé les citoyens, on risque de perdre la liberté et d'étouffer la raison. L'histoire offre la preuve de cette vérité. Combien de fois, malgré les généreux efforts des amis de la liberté, une seule bataille n'a-t-elle pas réduit des nations à une servitude de plusieurs siècles! - Pourquoi ne pas profiter de cette expérience funeste, et savoir attendre des progrès des lumières une liberté plus réelle, plus durable et plus paisible?”

[*]*Vie de Voltaire, par M****, throughout.

[*]“Peut-être avant l'invention de l'imprimerie était-il impossible à se soustraire au joug.”

[*]See this subject farther pursued in Appendix, No. III.

[*]Lives of the Poets: Life of West.

[*]Vide Appendices to Book II, Chap. II.

[*]The reader, who is indisposed to abstruse speculations, will find the other members of the enquiry sufficiently connected, without an express reference to the remaining part of the present book.

[*]The reader will find the substance of the above arguments in a more diffusive form in Hume's Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, being the third part of his Essays.

[*]The argument from the impossibility of free will is treated with great force of reasoning in Jonathan Edwards's Enquiry into the Freedom of the Will.

[*]The above will be found to be a tolerably accurate description of the hypothesis of the celebrated Hartley. It was unnecessary to quote his words, as it would be foreign to the plan of the present work to enter into a refutation of any individual writer. The sagacity of Hartley, in having pointed out the necessary connexion of the phenomena of mind, and shewn the practicability of reducing its different operations to a simple principle, cannot be too highly applauded. The reasonings of the present chapter, if true, may be considered as giving farther stability to his principal doctrine by freeing it from the scheme of material automatism with which it was unnecessarily clogged.

[*]An attempt has been made to calculate these, but there is no reason to believe that the calculation deserves to be considered as a standard of truth. Sensations leave their images behind them, some for a longer and some for a shorter time; so that, in two different instances, the calculation is in one case eight, and in another three hundred and twenty to a second. See Watson on Time, Ch.II.

[*]"La plus sublime vertu est négative; elles nous instruit de ne jamais faire du mal à personne." EMILE, LIV. II.

[*]Ch. IV. p. 233.

[*]The first of the three heads discussed in this chapter is inserted chiefly for the sake of method, few persons having really doubted that virtue is the most genuine source of individual tranquillity and happiness. It is therefore dismissed with all practicable brevity. The two remaining heads had a stronger claim to discussion. It unfortunately happens to be the generally received opinion, that rigid virtue is neither the surest road to other men's approbation and esteem, nor the most probable means of securing our external prosperity. If the author had known of any work at present existing, that had appeared to him to place this subject in any degree in its true light, he would have omitted the reasonings of this chapter.