

that a man who writes as he does "could be anything but kind-hearted," he infers from a handwriting what it is all but impossible that a handwriting could disclose. No doubt, a handwriting may suggest largeness, frankness, openness of mind,—may suggest the naturalness and pleasurable of the task of opening the writer's mind to the friend, or to the world of friends, for whom it is intended; but we very much doubt whether this suggestion is not, even where it corresponds with the truth, a mere coincidence. When we remember that the handwriting is formed not in any attempt to communicate one's mind to others, but in painful efforts to acquire the art of recalling to oneself what one has seen or heard,—that young people write, at the time their hand is being formed, for every sheet of genuine correspondence, reams of paper hastily filled with notes of lectures, or copies of the writings of others, or records of what they have read, the mood in which they write being mostly not a social mood at all, but the mood of one who is making arrangements for renewing impressions which he is otherwise likely to lose,—it does not seem very likely that the attitude of the mind towards others, should be one of the chief characteristics to imprint itself on the handwriting. On the other hand, there are characteristics which, even in the operation of writing down such matters as these, would be sure to betray themselves. If a man is, or is not, in so great a hurry to get to the end that he slurs over the means—in other words, if he is patient or impatient of the mechanical processes he has to get through in order to attain his end—that patience or impatience will be sure to show itself, and we know nothing of which it is so generally easy to judge from a handwriting, as of the patience or impatience of a man's temperament in this respect. Again, no doubt, energy, or the want of energy, may be discovered from the handwriting; for energy, or want of energy, is just as likely to be displayed at the time the hand is forming, and just as likely to be reflected in the way in which the hand is formed, as patience or impatience itself. And the patience is quite distinct from the energy. You may have patient energy or patient indolence, impatient energy or impatient indolence, and all these will generally leave a clear stamp on the handwriting. In relation to this book, if we wanted an illustration of patient energy, we should take the autograph of Joseph Mazzini, which our author says typifies "the wisdom of the serpent united to the harmlessness of the dove." It really typifies neither wisdom nor harmlessness, any more than it typifies either the serpent or the dove. It typifies indomitable patience and intensity, with a certain amount, we should say, of self-consciousness and self-esteem as well. In Mr. Carlyle's writing there is, again, a curious mixture of both patience and impatience, with the energy which is its great characteristic. The patience is reflected in the very careful detail,—the punctuation, the completeness, the neat divisions. But the impatience shows itself in the crosses and flourishes, on which, as not being essential to the meaning, Mr. Carlyle expends the excitability of his temperament. Here, then, you have proof of superabundance of energy,—of the careful self-restraint which keeps this energy from so overflowing as to spoil the adaptation of the writer's means to his end,—and yet of his satisfaction in letting it express itself through the odds and ends of his writing, though not in a manner to interfere with the utilities of that writing, with its subservience to its main purpose. But how little way such indications as these go towards any general expression of the character, we may illustrate by referring to the writing of Charles Dickens,—which is not contained in this book,—writing which indicates as much patience in the detail as Mazzini's or Carlyle's, not less impatience in the redundant flourishes and much more of rhetorical *nuance* in them than in Carlyle's, and as much energy, too, as in either of them; but not the less Dickens's hand is totally unlike either of theirs, being a much more outward hand than either,—a hand that seems to be sweeping towards and grasping after a distant end, rather than making itself sure of a present possession.

Another quality of which handwriting usually,—not always—gives clear indications, is the elasticity or stiffness of the writer in adapting his mind to external demands. Of literary men, you always find that *flowing* power, such as Charles Reade's, or Charles Dickens's, or Sir Henry Taylor's, or Anthony Trollope's, is expressed in an easy running hand,—lucid and harmonious or otherwise, in proportion generally to the amount of orderly or artistic feeling in the writer's mind. Carlyle, for instance, though one of the most poetical of seers, is certainly not

fluent. His thought reconstructs with pain and difficulty what his mind and eyes have seen, and in the patient, but somewhat crabbed, and oddly emphasized handwriting, you see this. But Sir Henry Taylor's hand runs as free and as clear as the Thames at Richmond. Mr. Trollope's runs as easily as the needle jerking up and down in a sewing-machine; and Professor Tyndall's, who has as much at least in him of the orator as of the man of science, and whose mind is eminently flexible in the power of adapting itself to the external world, runs smooth as a bicycle. On the other hand, many poets, many very eloquent poets, seem to betray in their handwriting the conflict between their own thought and the words in which they are compelled to convey or note it down. Mr. Swinburne's seems always to be in a tangle, expressive of the way in which his mind overleaps the word he is dealing with, and mixes itself up with some other word with which he is not dealing. And in a very much less degree Mr. Tennyson's hand seems to throw over the words he writes shadows of dissatisfaction that they do not express something more or something less, or at all events, something different. Nothing is more noticeable than the difference between the hands of those who seem satisfied with their words, who seem to find a certain pleasure in the rapidity with which they express their thought, and the hands of those who are dissatisfied with their words, and are disposed to torture language till it expresses something more or less. Some of the musical composers especially—not the English musicians—seem utterly out of temper with words in general. Offenbach, Wagner, and Verdi wrote such hands as it is not easy to rival among human things,—as though words were a wrong to their soul, and a sort of parody on the true expressiveness of sound. And it is quite possible that in their case, even from their first use of written characters, a certain vexation against unmusical sounds may have rendered the habit of written speech unwelcome and irksome to them,—in short, that the conception of the sound made the task of conveying the sound to their own and other ears an ungracious one. If this should have been so, it would be but another illustration of the same kind of impatience as is visible in the minds of poets whose fancy so teems with appropriate words, that it is disposed to wrestle against the poverty of the word actually chosen, after all.

But what is clear to us is, that very little indeed of character can properly be inferred from handwriting, for this excellent reason, that only those parts of the character which are chiefly active while the hand is being first acquired and formed,—not those which are at work when it is used for its highest purposes,—can well express themselves in the handwriting. To find candour, amiability, sympathy, courage, distrust, suspicion, malice, cowardice, and so forth, in the handwriting, seems to us almost necessarily imaginary. The hand is formed under conditions which do not bring out or exercise such characteristics at all, in the case of ninety-nine men and women out of a hundred. It is formed under conditions which do give room, on the contrary, for the play of patience, energy, flexibility of mind, and a certain dash or awkwardness, and which may in certain exceptional cases give room also for the play of the feeling for language and for the joy or pain of expression. Now, all qualities of the character which may thus have been prominent while the handwriting was being formed, may well impress themselves upon it. But you might as well expect to find in handwriting the evidence whether a man or a woman were fonder of arithmetic than of geometry, as to find in it, in the majority of cases, the evidence of the characteristic moral qualities with indicating which it is often credited.

THE MORAL IDEAL.—I.

AMONGST those who have attended to the controversies of the last few years some must have been led to ask the question,—Will the ideal of morality be affected by a great change in theological belief? Will men think differently of right and wrong when they have come to deny an unseen world? Many are ready to give the question a negative answer. "Kindness," they say, "must be always kindness, truthfulness must be always truthfulness, purity must be always purity, and these, in all their various ramifications, are too much identified with the welfare of the human race to be ever lost sight of as aims, whatever becomes of the props by which in their earlier stages they were supported, and out of which, it may be, they seemed to grow. "Look here, and there," they add; "you will find this

and that excellent and amiable being who has long since cast off all this theological trellis-work, as you consider it, for morality, and whose notions of goodness seem much the same as those of some worthy man who never fails to appear by the side of his wife and children in the family pew." And we do not think they are answered by one argument we often hear brought against them, that the type of character moulded by Christianity is shown in those who have denied Christianity. Nevertheless, we are surprised that their view can commend itself to any thoughtful mind. It appears to us absolutely certain that no element of moral excellence will remain in common to those who believe the important fact about themselves to be their relation to a seen and unseen world respectively, except one which we allow to be of great importance,—the desire to promote the physical welfare of every human being. This will remain the common section of the two spheres, no doubt. But we believe, as the metaphor implies, that they can have nothing else in common.

That men have at all times meant much the same thing by goodness is what no one—not even one who thinks they always will mean the same thing by it—will assert. The moral ideal of the classical world is unquestionably different from the ideal of Christianity. It differs from it by the whole diameter of what we are apt to consider as, in a special sense, "morality." The very word "virtue" embodies the change which that ideal has undergone. How rarely do we use the expression "a virtuous man." How unnatural would it have appeared to a Roman to speak of a woman as distinguished by "virtus." The idea has passed over from the world of the man to the world of the woman. But, indeed, the associations with which it is pregnant for modern ears can hardly be said to have existed for the ancient world. The great philosopher of Greece framed an ideal State in which purity should be impossible. A typical hero of Rome lends his wife to a friend. The most profligate of moderns would not have imitated the impartiality practised by Cato, and advocated by the Platonic Socrates. We do not enough consider how profoundly the whole moral life is modified by a difference of this kind. It is not that to the virtues of Greece and Rome we have added that of purity. The whole structure is modified by such an addition.

We have instanced the great salient distinction of the ancient and modern ideal as the most striking proof we could bring forward that what is meant by goodness in one age is different from what is meant by it in another. It is not the only, but it is the most forcible, illustration of the divergence of standard between those who knew nothing of, and those who had received, the teaching of Christ. That the new sacredness of the individual had some connection with the endless future then opened to the individual, and previously belonging alone to that ideal being—the State—which absorbed all absolute and unflinching loyalty,—this, we suppose, will be disputed by very few. The only dispute would be as to which of these changes was cause and which effect, and on that we need not enter, while urging that convictions and moral principles rise and fall together. Whether the new faith was the cause or the effect of the new morality, at all events the two things began to exist at the same time. And assuredly men will discover in the future, as they have in the past, that their moral being is an organic whole. The law of its correlation will show itself with regard to those who discard Christianity, as compared with Christians, no less surely than to those who knew nothing of Christianity, though we are far from asserting that the change will affect the same regions of morality. The change of our spiritual atmosphere must influence profoundly our sense of moral claim.

Duty has an evident reference to desire. Where wishes lead, thither obligations must follow. But what is the relation between your desire and my duty? A hungry man wants a piece of bread; I ought to give it him, if I can. A drunken man wants a glass of wine; I ought to prevent his getting it, if I can. The desire that it is right to frustrate, may be far stronger than the desire that it is right to gratify. If the desires of others were all as obvious to us as their countenances, and our power to satisfy them were boundless, the whole problem of duty would still remain to be solved. Our mutual benevolence may oppose a strong barrier to our separate desires. From your point of view, true kindness may lead you to close the book I want to read. From my point of view, true kindness may lead me to close the door you want to open. It avails nothing to tell us that help is always good. We want to be taught what help *is*.

It has always seemed to us a strange delusion which has led

ethical writers to suppose they have carried analysis a step further, when they have resolved virtue into a regard for the general welfare. They have only exchanged one complex idea for another. We should say, indeed, that they have exchanged a less complex idea for a more complex one; duty seems to us a simpler reality than welfare. Two things are necessary to rightness,—certainty as to the aims of life, and unselfish surrender to the claim which enforces them. Both these things seem to us also necessary to happiness, and many other things besides are unquestionably also necessary. Mr. J. S. Mill seems to have thought it possible to keep the idea of pleasure as a simple and ultimate reality, while yet claiming for one class of pleasures an absolute superiority over another by referring the decision as to this superiority to one who knows both classes. The opinion seems to us a striking illustration of the narrowness of the intellectual life. We may, and often do, pronounce with absolute certainty that one of two pleasures is best, without having any experience whatever of the other. The person who is most certain that you ought not to give a glass of wine to a drunkard, is generally the person who is furthest removed from the power of comparing the relative advantages of sobriety and intoxication. It is in absolute ignorance of one term of comparison, that he decides on the preferability of the other. It is true that you would prevent a man making himself drunk for the sake of other people, but surely you would be quite certain that you were consulting his own interest in doing so, and would indeed still do it, if you could, were you considering his own interest solely. Or take another case, where it is impossible that any one should compare two aims before he acts on the view that one is best. A man falls accidentally into the sea, and you, being a good swimmer, save his life; you are regarded as his benefactor. Another man throws himself purposely into the sea, and you do the same, and most people have the same opinion of this action as of the first. Yet the first gratifies, and the second opposes, a strong desire. And no human being knows what that experience is, to which the strong desire leads. In utter ignorance of one alternative, we decide that the other is best.

If benevolence, or kindness, or love—whatever we are to call that care for others which is the very soul of goodness—if this implies a selection in the wishes of others, and an opposition to some, no less than a furtherance of others, it evidently cannot be a simple or ultimate quality. It refers to some standard behind the desire it furthers or opposes. It implies an ideal.

This obvious truth is hidden from the eyes of many people, by the peculiar obtrusiveness of those desires which are independent of an ideal. The small part of the nature which is affected by physical desires is forgotten in contemplating the wide area over which they extend, and the imperiousness with which they make themselves felt. It is not only that all might feel them, but that so many *do* feel them. While whole classes suffer from hunger, the relief of their need must be a large common object, uniting those who differ in everything else they desire to confer on the needy ones, and uniting them therefore in that aim which at the moment is most important. For these physical needs are not only the most wide-spread, they are also the most imperious. Hunger, beyond a certain pitch, constitutes a craving more uncontrollable than any need of the soul. Desires which are actually felt by many, which are potentially felt by all, and which are so peculiarly active and dominant in manifesting their presence, naturally obtain an undue place in the moral scheme. And to all these causes for confusion must be added, in the case of one party concerned in the divergence we are describing, a growing attention to the outward and material world to which these desires relate. No wonder that those who regard man's physical organisation as *himself*, are blind to the importance of those needs which find their root elsewhere.

Another source of confusion is to be found in the fact that the antithesis we imagine between pleasure and pain is a fiction of the logical intellect. There is no equivalence between our recoil from evil and our attraction towards good. We have one absolutely common point of recoil,—every sentient being dreads physical pain. But this pole of repulsion has no corresponding pole of attraction. Two passengers in a railway-train, differing as much as men can differ, would feel a common fear on learning that a collision was imminent. Perhaps no conceivable intelligence could have inspired them with a common hope. There is a striking passage in one of Newman's sermons, in which he imagines a spirit unprepared

for such a summons hearing the words, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." The profound joylessness with which that which to all around is the highest joy would be greeted by such a one, is no more than the type of that strange dislocation of possession and desire which all, we suppose, have felt in some degree, but which none have felt, and none can feel, as it would be felt by him who, choosing with his whole heart the happiness appropriate to either of the ideals we are endeavouring to contrast, should be encompassed by that which is appropriate to the other. He would discover that the portal which bore for his eyes the warning to abandon all hope, was that which led to his neighbour's heaven.

If one man's ideal of happiness thus differs from another's, their ideal of duty cannot possibly coincide. It is not only that my duty is different from your duty, but my duty in your place would be different from your duty. "A man must strive to be a better citizen, a better father, a better son, a better husband," says the most emphatic of recent opponents of Christianity; and the most earnest advocate of Christianity would use the same words. But would they mean the same thing? We are all agreed that a man must strive to be a better father; no other fact is so important, about almost every man that ever lived, as the kind of influence he exercised over those for whose existence he was directly responsible. But do the two persons whose ideal we are contrasting mean the same thing by a good father? Can we not all recollect occasions on which the words meant one thing on the speaker's lips, another in the hearer's ears? It is conceivable that a man shall look back on his education with an almost passionate wish that everything had been different in it, while his father reviews the same series of events with a calm sense of having, on the whole, lived up to his ideal, and done his best for his son. Here there is as simple a case as you can imagine, where two persons, thoroughly and completely acquainted with the facts, would differ as to the question whether you should call the result good or bad. It seems to us a very small specimen of the difficulties which would start up on the right hand and the left, if two persons exchanged their ideas on duty, one looking up to an unseen ruler above him and an endless future before him, the other exchanging the unseen ruler for the "tribal self" and the endless future before him for a very long continuance of his posterity.

No doubt, large practical aims remain in common, to those who inhabit an unseen world and those who dwell solely in the visible one. The poor have to be fed, the weak have to be sheltered from outrage and plunder, life has to be made safe, property has to be protected, this is what we all want to have done. But we must all wish to fit ourselves for the permanent condition of our existence, and while all are sensible of desires that belong to the visible, some of us also know something of those that belong to the invisible universe. The former, we cannot too emphatically concede, are always the keenest. They are also the most regularly present. As the animal life is more intermittent than the vegetable life, so is spiritual life more intermittent than animal life. The fainter and more intermittent desires are easily stifled, and easily forgotten. But they assert an absolute predominance, while they are felt at all. And does not the idea of human welfare take a different tinge, according as we see in these desires mere uneasy stirrings, bequeathed by a forgotten legend, the fading impress made on sentiment by a past intellectual delusion; or prophetic impulses, foreshadowing the permanent condition of every human being?

Whenever we are thrown with those whose moral aims are profoundly different from our own, we shall discover that men are grouped by their ideals, no less than by their nationality. Christianity seems to mean very different things, as long as it is contemplated from the outside. "See how these Christians love one another," has been a deserved sarcasm on the mutual hostilities of those who acknowledged a common Lord. But after all, might not party spirit be set in an equally telling contrast beside the supposed bond of our English blood? Radical and Tory, in the ordinary intercourse of life, may feel each other more alien than Englishman and foreigner. But let Englishman and Englishman meet under tropic skies, amid a dusky race and an unknown tongue, and are not their common speech, their common reminiscences of green lanes and trim homesteads, more to them than any difference which, with that background, is felt to divide them? Thus it is with the fatherland of the spirit. So long as the world was

with Christianity, the differences between Christians were more glaring than the difference between them and any common opponent. Yet let the world declare itself once more their foe—and every day seems to us to bring that declaration nearer—and they will feel, as in the infancy of their faith, that the differences that divide them are but as the Doric and Ionic of a common Hellenic tongue. There is a beautiful apocryphal legend narrating how St. Peter and St. Paul, after many dissensions and many wanderings, met in the streets of the great metropolis of the ancient world, and there, as for the first time, understood each other. "Postremo in Urbe, quasi tunc primum, invicem sibi cognitos." It seems to us a kind of parable of what many may be led to feel in our own day. We have misunderstood each other, we have persecuted each other, we have hated each other. But meeting at the heart of a mighty world which regards us with scorn as aliens, shall we not recognise a common hope, a common allegiance, which no other differences can destroy?

If it be so—if, in spite of all that divides us, we are one, in the face of those who deny that which binds us—you cannot take the residuum left when our divergences from our opponents are removed, and make that stand for the human ideal. You will find that in that case the human ideal is the animal ideal. To say that Christian morality is an *effete* thing, to be swept aside with an outworn creed, is intelligible; to bring forward a morality which is to supersede it, is conceivable; but to suppose that Christian morality has a value which the enemies of Christianity can appropriate,—that the ethical lessons it has taught mankind remain unaffected by the removal of its main assumptions, this seems to us strange delusion. Every year, if the present movement of thought continues, will, we believe, make it more clear to impartial minds that Christians and Materialists, so far as they are consistent, confront each other, not as persons who differ about one important subject, and setting that on one side have the rest of their aims and views in common, but as inhabitants of different spiritual continents. They will speak a different language, they will need a different atmosphere. They may for a moment cross the chasm, they may, as members of the most dissimilar nations may do, meet in mutual friendship, and strong sympathy on particular departments of interest. But a common life, a common body of desire and hope and aim, is as impossible to them as would be a common home to a fish and a bird.

Something we could say of the nature of these differences, for the new ideal seems to us already to gather a certain distinctness of outline, and some points in which it is to be contrasted with the old one are becoming clear. But we have exhausted our space, in the mere protest against the confusion of the two. Any attempt at a further distinction between them must be referred to a subsequent article.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

DOUBTING DOUBT.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE "SPECTATOR."]

SIR,—It appears to me that both Mr. Gladstone's address to the students at Glasgow, and your very interesting comments upon it lose something of the force with which they might state their case, from their use of the word "doubt," instead of "denial." You, indeed, do speak of Socrates as "applying to the creed of *denial* the touchstone of doubt," but I should say hardly with an adequate sense of the importance of the substitution. Surely it is of the greatest importance. If such men as Professor Clifford had come to *doubt* the existence of a spiritual world, the change would be almost as startling as if they came to believe in it. Their state of mind is as unlike doubt as that of some old-fashioned Evangelical. I cannot but fancy that what Mr. Gladstone meant by the doubt he desired to meet was unbelief, and what he meant by the doubt he desired to awaken was doubt in the proper sense of the word.

But I should not trouble you with mere verbal criticism—for in your article, at all events, the substitution of "*denial*" for "*doubt*" and "*negative*" for "*sceptical*" would obviate all my objections—if this substitution of doubt for denial did not appear to me to point out the answer, on its intellectual side, to the negative thought of our day. There is a strong conviction, wrought into the very warp and woof of the mind, that mere denial cannot rise above a doubt. Certainty, we all feel, must be certainty of *what is*; it can never transcend the limits