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CRITICAL MISCELLANIES

BY

JOHN MORLEY

VOL. III.

ESSAY 2: THE DEATH OF MR MILL

ESSAY 3: MR MILL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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THE DEATH OF MR. MILL.

(May 1873.)

The tragic commonplaces of the grave sound a fuller note as we mourn for one of the greater among the servants of humanity. A strong and pure light is gone out, the radiance of a clear vision and a beneficent purpose. One of those high and most worthy spirits who arise from time to time to stir their generation with new mental impulses in the deeper things, has perished from among us. The death of one who did so much to impress on his contemporaries that physical law works independently of moral law, marks with profounder emphasis the ever ancient and ever fresh decree that there is one end to the just and the unjust, and that the same strait tomb awaits alike the poor dead whom nature or circumstance imprisoned in mean horizons, and those who saw far and felt passionately and put their reason to noble uses. Yet the fulness of our grief is softened by a certain greatness and solemnity in the event. The teachers of men are so few, the gift of intellectual fatherhood is so rare, it is surrounded by such singular gloriousness. The loss of a powerful and generous statesman, or of a great master in letters or art, touches us with many a vivid regret. The Teacher, the man who has talents and has virtues, and yet has a further something which is neither talent nor virtue, and which gives him the mysterious secret of drawing men after him, leaves a deeper sense of emptiness than this; but lamentation is at once soothed and elevated by a sense of sacredness in the occasion. Even those whom Mr. Mill honoured with his friendship, and who must always bear to his memory the affectionate veneration of sons, may yet feel their pain at the thought that they will see him no more, raised into a higher mood as they meditate on the loftiness of his task and the steadfastness and success with which he achieved it. If it is grievous to think that such richness of culture, such full maturity of wisdom, such passion for truth and justice, are now by a single stroke extinguished, at least we may find some not unworthy solace in the thought of the splendid purpose that they have served in keeping alive, and surrounding with new attractions, the difficult tradition of patient and accurate thinking in union with unselfish and magnanimous living.

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Much will one day have to be said as to the precise value of Mr. Mill's philosophical principles, the more or less of his triumphs as a dialectician, his skill as a critic and an expositor. However this trial may go, we shall at any rate be sure that with his reputation will stand or fall the intellectual repute of a whole generation of his countrymen. The most eminent of those who are now so fast becoming the front line, as death mows down the veterans, all bear traces of his influence, whether they are avowed disciples or avowed opponents. If they did not accept his method of thinking, at least he determined the questions which they should think about. For twenty years no one at all open to serious intellectual impressions has left Oxford without having undergone the influence of Mr. Mill's teaching, though it would be too much to say that in that gray temple where they are ever burnishing new idols, his throne is still unshaken. The professorial chairs there and elsewhere are more and more being filled with men whose minds

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have been trained in his principles. The universities only typify his influence on the less learned part of the world. The better sort of journalists educated themselves on his books, and even the baser sort acquired a habit of quoting from them. He is the only writer in the world whose treatises on highly abstract subjects have been printed during his lifetime in editions for the people, and sold at the price of railway novels. Foreigners from all countries read his books as attentively as his most eager English disciples, and sought his opinion as to their own questions with as much reverence as if he had been a native oracle. An eminent American who came over on an official mission which brought him into contact with most of the leading statesmen throughout Europe, said to the present writer:—'The man who impressed me most of them all was Stuart Mill; you placed before him the facts on which you sought his opinion. He took them, gave you the different ways in which they might fairly be looked at, balanced the opposing considerations, and then handed you a final judgment in which nothing was left out. His mind worked like a splendid piece of machinery; you supply it with raw material, and it turns you out a perfectly finished product.' Of such a man England has good reason to be very proud.

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He was stamped in many respects with specially English quality. He is the latest chief of a distinctively English school of philosophy, in which, as has been said, the names of Locke, Hume, Adam Smith, and Bentham (and Mr. Mill would have added James Mill) mark the line of succession—the school whose method subordinates imagination to observation, and whose doctrine lays the foundations of knowledge in experience, and the tests of conduct in utility. Yet, for all this, one of his most remarkable characteristics was less English than French; his constant admission of an ideal and imaginative element in social speculation, and a glowing persuasion that the effort and wisdom and ingenuity of men are capable, if free opportunity be given by social arrangements, of raising human destiny to a pitch that is at present beyond our powers of conception. Perhaps the sum of all his distinction lies in this union of stern science with infinite aspiration, of rigorous sense of what is real and practicable with bright and luminous hope. He told one who was speaking of Condorcet's Life of Turgot, that in his younger days whenever he was inclined to be discouraged, he was in the habit of turning to this book, and that he never did so without recovering possession of himself. To the same friend, who had printed something comparing Mr. Mill's repulse at Westminster with the dismissal of the great minister of Lewis the Sixteenth, he wrote:—'I never received so gratifying a compliment as the comparison of me to Turgot; it is indeed an honour to me that such an assimilation should have occurred to you.' Those who have studied the character of one whom even the rigid Austin thought worthy to be called 'the godlike Turgot,' know both the nobleness and the rarity of this type.

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Its force lies not in single elements, but in that combination of an ardent interest in human improvement with a reasoned attention to the law of its conditions, which alone deserves to be honoured with the high name of wisdom. This completeness was one of the secrets of Mr. Mill's peculiar attraction for young men, and for the comparatively few women whose intellectual interest was strong enough to draw them to his books. He satisfied the ingenuous moral ardour which is instinctive in the best natures, until the dust of daily life dulls or extinguishes it, and at the same time he satisfied the rationalistic qualities, which are not less marked in the youthful temperament of those who by and by do the work of the world. This mixture of intellectual gravity with a passionate love of improvement in all the aims and instruments of life, made many intelligences alive who would otherwise have slumbered, or sunk either into a dry pedantry on the one hand, or a windy, mischievous philanthropy on the other. He showed himself so wholly free from the vulgarity of the sage. He could hope for the future without taking his eye from the realities of the present. He recognised the social destination of knowledge, and kept the elevation of the great art of social existence ever before him, as the ultimate end of all speculative activity.

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Another side of this rare combination was his union of courage with patience, of firm nonconformity with silent conformity. Compliance is always a question of degree, depending on time, circumstance, and subject. Mr. Mill hit the exact mean, equally distant from timorous caution and self-indulgent violence. He was unrivalled in the difficult art of conciliating as much support as was possible and alienating as little sympathy as possible, for novel and extremely unpopular opinions. He was not one of those who strive to spread new faiths by brilliant swordplay with buttoned foils, and he was not one of those who run amuck among the idols of the tribe and the market-place and the theatre. He knew how to kindle the energy of all who were likely to be persuaded by his reasoning, without stimulating in a corresponding degree the energy of persons whose convictions he attacked. Thus he husbanded the strength of truth, and avoided wasteful friction. Probably no English writer that ever lived has done so much as Mr. Mill to cut at the very root of the theological spirit, yet there is only one passage in the writings published during his lifetime—I mean a well-known passage in the Liberty—which could give any offence to the most devout person. His conformity, one need hardly say, never went beyond the negative degree, nor ever passed beyond the conformity of silence. That guilty and grievously common pusillanimity which leads men to make or act hypocritical professions, always moved his deepest abhorrence. And he did not fear publicly to testify his interest in the return of an atheist to parliament.

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His courage was not of the spurious kinds arising from anger, or ignorance of the peril, or levity, or a reckless confidence. These are all very easy. His distinction was that he knew all the danger to himself, was anxious to save pain to others, was buoyed up by no rash hope that the world was to be permanently bettered at a stroke, and yet for all this he knew how to present an undaunted front to a majority. The only fear he ever knew was fear lest a premature or excessive utterance should harm a good cause. He had measured the prejudices of men, and his desire to arouse this obstructive force in the least degree compatible with effective advocacy of any improvement, set

the single limit to his intrepidity. Prejudices were to him like physical predispositions, with which you have to make your account. He knew, too, that they are often bound up with the most valuable elements in character and life, and hence he feared that violent surgery which in eradicating a false opinion fatally bruises at the same time a true and wholesome feeling that may cling to it. The patience which with some men is an instinct, and with others a fair name for indifference, was with him an acquisition of reason and conscience.

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The value of this wise and virtuous mixture of boldness with tolerance, of courageous speech with courageous reserve, has been enormous. Along with his direct pleas for freedom of thought and freedom of speech, it has been the chief source of that liberty of expressing unpopular opinions in this country without social persecution, which is now so nearly complete, that he himself was at last astonished by it. The manner of his dialectic, firm and vigorous as the dialectic was in matter, has gradually introduced mitigating elements into the atmosphere of opinion. Partly, no doubt, the singular tolerance of free discussion which now prevails in England—I do not mean that it is at all perfect—arises from the prevalent scepticism, from indifference, and from the influence of some of the more high-minded of the clergy. But Mr. Mill's steadfast abstinence from drawing wholesale indictments against persons or classes whose opinions he controverted, his generous candour, his scrupulous respect for any germ of good in whatever company it was found, and his large allowances, contributed positive elements to what might otherwise have been the negative tolerance that comes of moral stagnation. Tolerance of distasteful notions in others became associated in his person at once with the widest enlightenment, and the strongest conviction of the truth of our own notions.

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His career, beside all else, was a protest of the simplest and loftiest kind against some of the most degrading features of our society. No one is more alive than he was to the worth of all that adds grace and dignity to human life; but the sincerity of this feeling filled him with aversion for the make-believe dignity of a luxurious and artificial community. Without either arrogance or bitterness, he stood aloof from that conventional intercourse which is misnamed social duty. Without either discourtesy or cynicism, he refused to play a part in that dance of mimes which passes for life among the upper classes. In him, to extraordinary intellectual attainments was added the gift of a firm and steadfast self-respect, which unfortunately does not always go with them. He felt the reality of things, and it was easier for a workman than for a princess to obtain access to him. It is not always the men who talk most affectingly about our being all of one flesh and blood, who are proof against those mysterious charms of superior rank, which do so much to foster unworthy conceptions of life in English society; and there are many people capable of accepting Mr. Mill's social principles, and the theoretical corollaries they contain, who yet would condemn his manly plainness and austere consistency in acting on them. The too common tendency in us all to moral slovenliness, and a lazy contentment with a little flaccid protest against evil, finds a constant rebuke in his career. The indomitable passion for justice which made him strive so long and so tenaciously to bring to judgment a public official, whom he conceived to be a great criminal, was worthy of one of the stoutest patriots in our seventeenth-century history. The same moral thoroughness stirred the same indignation in him on a more recent occasion, when he declared it 'a permanent disgrace to the Government that the iniquitous sentence on the gas-stokers was not remitted as soon as passed.'

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Much of his most striking quality was owing to the exceptional degree in which he was alive to the constant tendency of society to lose some excellence of aim, to relapse at some point from the standard of truth and right which had been reached by long previous effort, to fall back in height of moral ideal. He was keenly sensible that it is only by persistent striving after improvement in our conceptions of duty, and improvement in the external means for realising them, that even the acquisitions of past generations are retained. He knew the intense difficulty of making life better by ever so little. Hence at once the exaltation of his own ideas of truth and right, and his eagerness to conciliate anything like virtuous social feeling, in whatever intellectual or political association he found it. Hence also the vehemence of his passion for the unfettered and unchecked development of new ideas on all subjects, of originality in moral and social points of view; because repression, whether by public opinion or in any other way, may be the means of untold waste of gifts that might have conferred on mankind unspeakable benefits. The discipline and vigour of his understanding made him the least indulgent of judges to anything like charlatanry, and effectually prevented his unwillingness to let the smallest good element be lost, from degenerating into that weak kind of universalism which nullifies some otherwise good men.

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Some great men seize upon us by the force of an imposing and majestic authority; their thoughts impress the imagination, their words are winged, they are as prophets bearing high testimony that cannot be gainsaid. Bossuet, for instance, or Pascal. Others, and of these Mr. Mill was one, acquire disciples not by a commanding authority, but by a moderate and impersonal kind of persuasion. He appeals not to our sense of greatness and power in a teacher, which is noble, but to our love of finding and embracing truth for ourselves, which is still nobler. People who like their teacher to be as a king publishing decrees with herald and trumpet, perhaps find Mr. Mill

Meditation on the influence of one who has been the foremost instructor of his time in wisdom and goodness quickly breaks off, in this hour when his loss is fresh upon us; it changes into affectionate reminiscences for which silence is more fitting. In such an hour thought turns rather to the person than the work of the master whom we mourn. We recall his simplicity, gentleness, heroic self-abnegation; his generosity in encouraging, his eager readiness in helping; the warm kindness of his accost, the friendly brightening of the eye. The last time I saw him was a few days before he left England.^[1] He came to spend a day with me in the country, of which the following brief notes happened to be written at the time in a letter to a friend:—

'He came down by the morning train to Guildford station, where I was waiting for him. He was in his most even and mellow humour. We walked in a leisurely way and through roundabout tracks for some four hours along the ancient green road which you know, over the high grassy downs, into old chalk pits picturesque with juniper and yew, across heaths and commons, and so up to our windy promontory, where the majestic prospect stirred him with lively delight. You know he is a fervent botanist, and every ten minutes he stooped to look at this or that on the path. Unluckily I am ignorant of the very rudiments of the matter, so his parenthetic enthusiasms were lost upon me.

'Of course he talked, and talked well. He admitted that Goethe had added new points of view to life, but has a deep dislike of his moral character; wondered how a man who could draw the sorrows of a deserted woman like Aurelia, in *Wilhelm Meister*, should yet have behaved so systematically ill to women. Goethe tried as hard as he could to be a Greek, yet his failure to produce anything perfect in form, except a few lyrics, proves the irresistible expansion of the modern spirit, and the inadequateness of the Greek type to modern needs of activity and expression. Greatly prefers Schiller in all respects; turning to him from Goethe is like going into the fresh air from a hothouse.

'Spoke of style: thinks Goldsmith unsurpassed; then Addison comes. Greatly dislikes the style of Junius and of Gibbon; indeed, thinks meanly of the latter in all respects, except for his research, which alone of the work of that century stands the test of nineteenth-century criticism. Did not agree with me that George Sand's is the high-water mark of prose, but yet could not name anybody higher, and admitted that her prose stirs you like music.

'Seemed disposed to think that the most feasible solution of the Irish University question is a Catholic University, the restrictive and obscurantist tendencies of which you may expect to have checked by the active competition of life with men trained in more enlightened systems. Spoke of Home Rule.

'Made remarks on the difference in the feeling of modern refusers of Christianity as compared with that of men like his father, impassioned deniers, who believed that if only you broke up the power of the priests and checked superstition, all would go well—a dream from which they were partially awakened by seeing that the French revolution, which overthrew the Church, still did not bring the millennium. His radical friends used to be very angry with him for loving Wordsworth. "Wordsworth," I used to say, "is against you, no doubt, in the battle which you are now waging, but after you have won, the world will need more than ever those qualities which Wordsworth is keeping alive and nourishing." In his youth mere negation of religion was a firm bond of union, social and otherwise, between men who agreed in nothing else.

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'Spoke of the modern tendency to pure theism, and met the objection that it retards improvement by turning the minds of some of the best men from social affairs, by the counter-proposition that it is useful to society, apart from the question of its truth,—useful as a provisional belief, because people will identify serviceable ministry to men with service of God. Thinks we cannot with any sort of precision define the coming modification of religion, but anticipates that it will undoubtedly rest upon the solidarity of mankind, as Comte said, and as you and I believe. Perceives two things, at any rate, which are likely to lead men to invest this with the moral authority of a religion; first, they will become more and more impressed by the awful fact that a piece of conduct to-day may prove a curse to men and women scores and even hundreds of years after the author of it is dead; and second, they will more and more feel that they can only satisfy their sentiment of gratitude to seen or unseen benefactors, can only repay the untold benefits they have inherited, by diligently maintaining the traditions of service.

'And so forth, full of interest and suggestiveness all through. When he got here, he chatted to R — over our lunch, with something of the simple amiableness of a child, about the wild flowers, the ways of insects, and notes of birds. He was impatient for the song of the nightingale. Then I drove him to our little roadside station, and one of the most delightful days of my life came to its end, like all other days, delightful and sorrowful.'

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Alas, the sorrowful day which ever dogs our delight followed very quickly. The nightingale that he longed for fills the darkness with music, but not for the ear of the dead master: he rests in the deeper darkness where the silence is unbroken for ever. We may console ourselves with the reflection offered by the dying Socrates to his sorrowful companions: he who has arrayed the soul

in her own proper jewels of moderation and justice and courage and nobleness and truth, is ever ready for the journey when his time comes. We have lost a great teacher and example of knowledge and virtue, but men will long feel the presence of his character about them, making them ashamed of what is indolent or selfish, and encouraging them to all disinterested labour, both in trying to do good and in trying to find out what the good is,—which is harder.

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MR. MILL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

Chercher en gémissant—search with many sighs—that was Pascal's notion of praiseworthy living and choosing the better part. Search, and search with much travail, strikes us as the chief intellectual ensign and device of that eminent man whose record of his own mental nurture and growth we have all been reading. Everybody endowed with energetic intelligence has a measure of the spirit of search poured out upon him. All such persons act on the Socratic maxim that the life without inquiry is a life to be lived by no man. But it is the rare distinction of a very few to accept the maxim in its full significance, to insist on an open mind as the true secret of wisdom, to press the examination and testing of our convictions as the true way at once to stability and growth of character, and thus to make of life what it is so good for us that it should be, a continual building up, a ceaseless fortifying and enlargement and multiplication of the treasures of the spirit. To make a point of 'examining what was said in defence of all opinions, however new or however old, in the conviction that even if they were errors there might be a substratum of truth underneath them, and that in any case the discovery of what it was that made them plausible would be a benefit to truth,'^[2]—to thrust out the spirit of party, of sect, of creed, of the poorer sort of self-esteem, of futile contentiousness, and so to seek and again seek with undeviating singleness of mind the right interpretation of our experiences—here is the genuine seal of intellectual mastery and the true stamp of a perfect rationality.

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The men to whom this is the ideal of the life of the reason, and who have done anything considerable towards spreading a desire after it, deserve to have their memories gratefully cherished even by those who do not agree with all their positive opinions. We need only to reflect a little on the conditions of human existence; on the urgent demand which material necessities inevitably make on so immense a proportion of our time and thought; on the space which is naturally filled up by the activity of absorbing affections; on the fatal power of mere tradition and report over the indifferent, and the fatal power of inveterate prejudice over so many even of the best of those who are not indifferent. Then we shall know better how to value such a type of character and life as Mr. Mill has now told us the story of, in which intellectual impressionableness on the most important subjects of human thought was so cultivated as almost to acquire the strength and quick responsiveness of emotional sensibility. And this, without the too common drawback to great openness of mind. This drawback consists in loose beliefs, taken up to-day and silently dropped to-morrow; vacillating opinions, constantly being exchanged for their contraries; feeble convictions, appearing, shifting, vanishing, in the quicksands of an unstable mind.

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Nobody will impute any of these disastrous weaknesses to Mr. Mill. His impressionableness was of the valuable positive kind, which adds and assimilates new elements from many quarters, without disturbing the organic structure of the whole. What he says of one stage in his growth remained generally true of him until the very end:—'I found the fabric of my old and taught opinions giving way in many fresh places, and I never allowed it to fall to pieces, but was incessantly occupied in weaving it anew. I never in the course of my transition was content to remain, for ever so short a time, confused and unsettled. When I had taken in any new idea, I could not rest till I had adjusted its relations to my old opinions, and ascertained exactly how far its effect ought to extend in modifying or superseding them' (p. 156). This careful and conscientious recognition of the duty of having ordered opinions, and of responsibility for these opinions being both as true and as consistent with one another as taking pains with his mind could make them, distinguished Mr. Mill from the men who flit aimlessly from doctrine to doctrine, as the flies of a summer day dart from point to point in the vacuous air. It distinguished him also from those sensitive spirits who fling themselves down from the heights of rationalism suddenly into the pit of an infallible church; and from those who, like La Mennais, move violently between faith and reason, between tradition and inquiry, between the fulness of deference to authority and the fulness of individual self-assertion.

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All minds of the first quality move and grow; they have a susceptibility to many sorts of new impressions, a mobility, a feeling outwards, which makes it impossible for them to remain in the stern fixity of an early implanted set of dogmas, whether philosophic or religious. In stoical tenacity of character, as well as in intellectual originality and concentrated force of understanding, some of those who knew both tell us that Mr. Mill was inferior to his father. But who does not feel in the son the serious charm of a power of adaptation and pliability which we can never associate with the hardy and more rigorous nature of the other? And it was just because he had this sensibility of the intellect, that the history of what it did for him is so edifying a performance for a people like ourselves, among whom that quality is so extremely uncommon. For it was the sensibility of strength and not of weakness, nor of mere over-refinement and subtlety. We may estimate the significance of such a difference, when we think how little, after all, the singular gifts of a Newman or a Maurice have done for their contemporaries, simply

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because these two eminent men allowed consciousness of their own weakness to 'sickly over' the spontaneous impulses of their strength.

The wonder is that the reaction against such an education as that through which James Mill brought his son,—an education so intense, so purely analytical, doing so much for the reason and so little for the satisfaction of the affections,—was not of the most violent kind. The wonder is that the crisis through which nearly every youth of good quality has to pass, and from which Mr. Mill, as he has told us, by no means escaped, did not land him in some of the extreme forms of transcendentalism. If it had done so the record of the journey would no doubt have been more abundant in melodramatic incidents. It would have done more to tickle the fancy of 'the present age of loud disputes but weak convictions.' And it might have been found more touching by the large numbers of talkers and writers who seem to think that a history of a careful man's opinions on grave and difficult subjects ought to have all the rapid movements and unexpected turns of a romance, and that a book without rapture and effusion and a great many capital letters must be joyless and disappointing. Those of us who dislike literary hysteria as much as we dislike the coarseness that mistakes itself for force, may well be glad to follow the mental history of a man who knew how to move and grow without any of these reactions and leaps on the one hand, or any of that overdone realism on the other, which may all make a more striking picture, but which do assuredly more often than not mark the ruin of a mind and the nullification of a career.

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If we are now and then conscious in the book of a certain want of spacing, of changing perspectives and long vistas; if we have perhaps a sense of being too narrowly enclosed; if we miss the relish of humour or the occasional relief of irony; we ought to remember that we are busy not with a work of imagination or art, but with the practical record of the formation of an eminent thinker's mental habits and the succession of his mental attitudes. The formation of such mental habits is not a romance, but the most arduous of real concerns. If we are led up to none of the enkindled summits of the soul, and plunged into none of its abysses, that is no reason why we should fail to be struck by the pale flame of strenuous self-possession, or touched by the ingenuousness and simplicity of the speaker's accents. A generation continually excited by narratives, as sterile as vehement, of storm and stress and spiritual shipwreck, might do well, if it knew the things that pertained to its peace, to ponder this unvarnished history—the history of a man who, though he was not one of the picturesque victims of the wasteful torments of an uneasy spiritual self-consciousness, yet laboured so patiently after the gifts of intellectual strength, and did so much permanently to widen the judgments of the world.

If Mr. Mill's Autobiography has no literary grandeur, nor artistic variety, it has the rarer merit of presenting for our contemplation a character that was infested by none of the smaller passions, and warped by none of the more unintelligent attitudes of the human mind. We have to remember that it is exactly these, the smaller passions on the one hand, and slovenliness of intelligence on the other, which are even worse agencies in spoiling the worth of life and the advance of society than the more imposing vices either of thought or sentiment. Many have told the tale of a life of much external eventfulness. There is a rarer instructiveness in the quiet career of one whose life was an incessant education, a persistent strengthening of the mental habit of 'never accepting half-solutions of difficulties as complete; never abandoning a puzzle, but again and again returning to it until it was cleared up; never allowing obscure corners of a subject to remain unexplored, because they did not appear important; never thinking that I perfectly understood any part of a subject until I understood the whole' (p. 123). It is true that this mental habit is not so singular in itself, for it is the common and indispensable merit of every truly scientific thinker. Mr. Mill's distinction lay in the deliberate intention and the systematic patience with which he brought it to the consideration of moral and religious and social subjects. In this region hitherto, for reasons that are not difficult to seek, the empire of prejudice and passion has been so much stronger, so much harder to resist, than in the field of physical science.

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Sect is so ready to succeed sect, and school comes after school, with constant replacement of one sort of orthodoxy by another sort, until even the principle of relativity becomes the base of a set of absolute and final dogmas, and the very doctrine of uncertainty itself becomes fixed in a kind of authoritative nihilism. It is, therefore, a signal gain that we now have a new type, with the old wise device, *μὲμνησο ἄπιστευ*—*be sure that you distrust*. Distrust your own bias; distrust your supposed knowledge; constantly try, prove, fortify your firmest convictions. And all this, throughout the whole domain where the intelligence rules. It was characteristic of a man of this type that he should have been seized by that memorable passage in Condorcet's Life of Turgot to which Mr. Mill refers (p. 114), and which every man with an active interest in serious affairs should bind about his neck and write on the tablets of his heart.

'Turgot,' says his wise biographer, 'always looked upon anything like a sect as mischievous.... From the moment that a sect comes into existence, all the individuals composing it become answerable for the faults and errors of each one of them. The obligation to remain united leads them to suppress or dissemble all truths that might wound anybody whose adhesion is useful to the sect. They are forced to establish in some form a body of doctrine, and the opinions which make a part of it, being adopted without inquiry, become in due time pure prejudices. Friendship stops with the individuals; but the hatred and envy that any of them may arouse extends to the whole sect. If this sect be formed by the most enlightened men of the nation, if the defence of truths of the greatest importance to the common happiness be the object of its zeal, the mischief is still worse. Everything true or useful which they propose is rejected without examination. Abuses and errors of every kind always have for their defenders that herd of presumptuous and mediocre mortals, who are the bitterest enemies of all celebrity and renown. Scarcely is a truth

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made clear, before those to whom it would be prejudicial crush it under the name of a sect that is sure to have already become odious, and are certain to keep it from obtaining so much as a hearing. Turgot, then, was persuaded that perhaps the greatest ill you can do to truth is to drive those who love it to form themselves into a sect, and that these in turn can commit no more fatal mistake than to have the vanity or the weakness to fall into the trap.'

Yet we know that with Mr. Mill as with Turgot this deep distrust of sect was no hindrance to the most careful systematisation of opinion and conduct. He did not interpret many-sidedness in the flaccid watery sense which flatters the indolence of so many of our contemporaries, who like to have their ears amused with a new doctrine each morning, to be held for a day, and dropped in the evening, and who have little more seriousness in their intellectual life than the busy insects of a summer noon. He says that he looked forward 'to a future which shall unite the best qualities of the critical with the best qualities of the organic periods; unchecked liberty of thought, unbounded freedom of individual action in all modes not hurtful to others; but also convictions as to what is right and wrong, useful and pernicious, deeply engraven on the feelings by early education and general unanimity of sentiment, and so firmly grounded in reason and the true exigencies of life, that they shall not, like all former and present creeds, religious, ethical, and political, require to be periodically thrown off and replaced by others' (p. 166). This was in some sort the type at which he aimed in the formation of his own character—a type that should combine organic with critical quality, the strength of an ordered set of convictions, with that pliability and that receptiveness in face of new truth, which are indispensable to these very convictions being held intelligently and in their best attainable form. We can understand the force of the eulogy on John Austin (p. 154), that he manifested 'an equal devotion to the two cardinal points of Liberty and Duty.' These are the correlatives in the sphere of action to the two cardinal points of Criticism and Belief in the sphere of thought.

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We can in the light of this double way of viewing the right balance of the mind, the better understand the combination of earnestness with tolerance which inconsiderate persons are apt to find so awkward a stumbling-block in the scheme of philosophic liberalism. Many people in our time have so ill understood the doctrine of liberty, that in some of the most active circles in society they now count you a bigot if you hold any proposition to be decidedly and unmistakably more true than any other. They pronounce you intemperate if you show anger and stern disappointment because men follow the wrong course instead of the right one. Mr. Mill's explanation of the vehemence and decision of his father's disapproval, when he did disapprove, and his refusal to allow honesty of purpose in the doer to soften his disapprobation of the deed, gives the reader a worthy and masculine notion of true tolerance. James Mill's 'aversion to many intellectual errors, or what he regarded as such, partook in a certain sense of the character of a moral feeling.... None but those who do not care about opinions will confound this with intolerance. Those, who having opinions which they hold to be immensely important, and their contraries to be prodigiously hurtful, have any deep regard for the general good, will necessarily dislike, as a class and in the abstract, those who think wrong what they think right, and right what they think wrong: though they need not be, nor was my father, insensible to good qualities in an opponent, nor governed in their estimation of individuals by one general presumption, instead of by the whole of their character. I grant that an earnest person, being no more infallible than other men, is liable to dislike people on account of opinions which do not merit dislike; but if he neither himself does them any ill office, nor connives at its being done by others, he is not intolerant: and the forbearance which flows from a conscientious sense of the importance to mankind of the equal freedom of all opinions is the only tolerance which is commendable, or to the highest moral order of minds, possible' (p. 51). This is another side of the co-ordination of Criticism and Belief, of Liberty and Duty, which attained in Mr. Mill himself a completeness that other men, less favoured in education and with less active power of self-control, are not likely to reach, but to reach it ought to be one of the prime objects of their mental discipline. The inculcation of this peculiar morality of the intelligence is one of the most urgently needed processes of our time. For the circumstance of our being in the very depths of a period of transition from one spiritual basis of thought to another, leads men not only to be content with holding a quantity of vague, confused, and contradictory opinions, but also to invest with the honourable name of candour a weak reluctance to hold any one of them earnestly.

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Mr. Mill experienced in the four or five last years of his life the disadvantage of trying to unite fairness towards the opinions from which he differed, with loyalty to the positive opinions which he accepted. 'As I had showed in my political writings,' he says, 'that I was aware of the weak points in democratic opinions, some Conservatives, it seems, had not been without hopes of finding me an opponent of democracy: as I was able to see the Conservative side of the question, they presumed that like them I could not see any other side. Yet if they had really read my writings, they would have known that after giving full weight to all that appeared to me well grounded in the arguments against democracy, I unhesitatingly decided in its favour, while recommending that it should be accompanied by such institutions as were consistent with its principle and calculated to ward off its inconveniences' (p. 309). This was only one illustration of what constantly happened, until at length, it is hardly too much to say, a man who had hitherto enjoyed a singular measure of general reverence because he was supposed to see truth in every doctrine, became downright unpopular among many classes in the community, because he saw more truth in one doctrine than another, and brought the propositions for whose acceptance he was most in earnest eagerly before the public.

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In a similar way the Autobiography shows us the picture of a man uniting profound self-respect with a singular neutrality where his own claims are concerned, a singular self-mastery and justice

of mind, in matters where with most men the sense of their own personality is wont to be so exacting and so easily irritated. The history of intellectual eminence is too often a history of immoderate egoism. It has perhaps hardly ever been given to any one who exerted such influence as Mr. Mill did over his contemporaries, to view his own share in it with such discrimination and equity as marks every page of his book, and as used to mark every word of his conversation. Knowing as we all do the last infirmity of even noble minds, and how deep the desire to erect himself Pope and Sir Oracle lies in the spirit of a man with strong convictions, we may value the more highly, as well for its rarity as for its intrinsic worth, Mr. Mill's quality of self-effacement, and his steadfast care to look anywhere rather than in his own personal merits, for the source of any of those excellences which he was never led by false modesty to dissemble.

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Many people seem to find the most interesting figure in the book that stoical father, whose austere, energetic, imperious, and relentless character showed the temperament of the Scotch Covenanter of the seventeenth century, inspired by the principles and philosophy of France in the eighteenth. No doubt, for those in search of strong dramatic effects, the lines of this strenuous indomitable nature are full of impressiveness.^[3] But one ought to be able to appreciate the distinction and strength of the father, and yet also be able to see that the distinction of the son's strength was in truth more really impressive still. We encounter a modesty that almost speaks the language of fatalism. Pieces of good fortune that most people would assuredly have either explained as due to their own penetration, or to the recognition of their worth by others, or else would have refrained from dwelling upon, as being no more than events of secondary importance, are by Mr. Mill invariably recognised at their full worth or even above it, and invariably spoken of as fortunate accidents, happy turns in the lottery of life, or in some other quiet fatalistic phrase, expressive of his deep feeling how much we owe to influences over which we have no control and for which we have no right to take any credit. His saying that 'it would be a blessing if the doctrine of necessity could be believed by all *quoad* the characters of others, and disbelieved in regard to their own' (p. 169), went even further than that, for he teaches us to accept the doctrine of necessity *quoad* the most marked felicities of life and character, and to lean lightly or not at all upon it in regard to our demerits. Humility is a rationalistic, no less than a Christian grace—not humility in face of error or arrogant pretensions or selfishness, nor a humility that paralyses energetic effort, but a steadfast consciousness of all the good gifts which our forerunners have made ready for us, and of the weight of our responsibility for transmitting these helpful forces to a new generation, not diminished but augmented.

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In more than one remarkable place the Autobiography shows us distinctly what all careful students of Mr. Mill's books supposed, that with him the social aim, the repayment of the services of the past by devotion to the services of present and future, was predominant over any merely speculative curiosity or abstract interest. His preference for deeply reserved ways of expressing even his strongest feelings prevented him from making any expansive show of this governing sentiment. Though no man was ever more free from any taint of that bad habit of us English, of denying or palliating an abuse or a wrong, unless we are prepared with an instant remedy for it, yet he had a strong aversion to mere socialistic declamation. Perhaps, if one may say so without presumption, he was not indulgent enough in this respect. I remember once pressing him with some enthusiasm for Victor Hugo,—an enthusiasm, one is glad to think, which time does nothing to weaken. Mr. Mill, admitting, though not too lavishly, the superb imaginative power of this poetic master of our time, still counted it a fatal drawback to Hugo's worth and claim to recognition that 'he has not brought forward one single practical proposal for the improvement of the society against which he is incessantly thundering.' I ventured to urge that it is unreasonable to ask a poet to draft acts of parliament; and that by bringing all the strength of his imagination and all the majestic fulness of his sympathy to bear on the social horrors and injustices which still lie so thick about us, he kindled an inextinguishable fire in the hearts of men of weaker initiative and less imperial gifts alike of imagination and sympathy, and so prepared the forces out of which practical proposals and specific improvements may be expected to issue. That so obvious a kind of reflection should not have previously interested Mr. Mill's judgment in favour of the writer of the *Outcasts*, the *Legend of the Ages*, the *Contemplations*, only shows how strong was his dislike to all that savoured of the grandiose, and how afraid he always was of everything that seemed to dissociate emotion from rationally directed effort. That he was himself inspired by this emotion of pity for the common people, of divine rage against the injustice of the strong to the weak, in a degree not inferior to Victor Hugo himself, his whole career most effectually demonstrates.

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It is this devotion to the substantial good of the many, though practised without the noisy or ostentatious professions of more egoistic thinkers, which binds together all the parts of his work, from the *System of Logic* down to his last speech on the Land Question. One of the most striking pages in the Autobiography is that in which he gives his reasons for composing the refutation of Hamilton, and as some of these especially valuable passages in the book seem to be running the risk of neglect in favour of those which happen to furnish material for the idle, pitiful gossip of London society, it may be well to reproduce it.

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'The difference,' he says, 'between these two schools of philosophy, that of Intuition and that of Experience and Association, is not a mere matter of abstract speculation; it is full of practical consequences, and lies at the foundation of all the greatest differences of practical opinion in an age of progress. The practical reformer has continually to demand that changes be made in

things which are supported by powerful and widely spread feelings, or to question the apparent necessity and indefeasibility of established facts; and it is often an indispensable part of his argument to show how those powerful feelings had their origin, and how those facts came to seem necessary and indefeasible. There is therefore a natural hostility between him and a philosophy which discourages the explanation of feelings and moral facts by circumstances and association, and prefers to treat them as ultimate elements of human nature; a philosophy which is addicted to holding up favourite doctrines as intuitive truths, and deems intuition to be the voice of Nature and of God, speaking with an authority higher than that of our reason. In particular, I have long felt that the prevailing tendency to regard all the marked distinctions of human character as innate, and in the main indelible, and to ignore the irresistible proofs that by far the greater part of those differences, whether between individuals, races, or sexes, are such as not only might but naturally would be produced by differences in circumstances, is one of the chief hindrances to the rational treatment of great social questions, and one of the greatest stumbling-blocks to human improvement. This tendency has its source in the intuitional metaphysics which characterised the reaction of the nineteenth century against the eighteenth, and it is a tendency so agreeable to human indolence, as well as to conservative interests generally, that unless attacked at the very root, it is sure to be carried to even a greater length than is really justified by the more moderate forms of the intuitional philosophy.... Considering then the writings and fame of Sir W. Hamilton as the great fortress of the intuitional philosophy in this country, a fortress the more formidable from the imposing character, and the, in many respects, great personal merits and mental endowments of the man, I thought it might be a real service to philosophy to attempt a thorough examination of all his most important doctrines, and an estimate of his general claims to eminence as a philosopher; and I was confirmed in this resolution by observing that in the writings of at least one, and him one of the ablest, of Sir W. Hamilton's followers, his peculiar doctrines were made the justification of a view of religion which I hold to be profoundly immoral—that it is our duty to bow down and worship before a Being whose moral attributes are affirmed to be unknowable by us, and to be perhaps extremely different from those which, when speaking of our fellow-creatures, we call by the same name' (pp. 273-275).

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Thus we see that even where the distance between the object of his inquiry and the practical wellbeing of mankind seemed farthest, still the latter was his starting point, and the doing 'a real service to philosophy' only occurred to him in connection with a still greater and more real service to those social causes for which, and which only, philosophy is worth cultivating. In the *System of Logic* the inspiration had been the same.

'The notion that truths external to the mind,' he writes, 'may be known by intuition or consciousness, independently of observation and experience, is, I am persuaded, in these times, the great intellectual support of false doctrines and bad institutions. By the aid of this theory every inveterate belief and every intense feeling of which the origin is not remembered, is enabled to dispense with the obligation of justifying itself by reason, and is erected into its own all-sufficient voucher and justification. There never was an instrument better devised for consecrating all deep-seated prejudices. And the chief strength of this false philosophy in morals, politics, and religion, lies in the appeal which it is accustomed to make to the evidence of mathematics and of the cognate branches of physical science. To expel it from these is to drive it from its stronghold.... In attempting to clear up the real nature of the evidence of mathematical and physical truth, the *System of Logic* met the intuitive philosophers on ground on which they had previously been deemed unassailable; and gave its own explanation from experience and association of that peculiar character of what are called necessary truths, which is adduced as proof that their evidence must come from a deeper source than experience. Whether this has been done effectually is still *sub judice*; and even then, to deprive a mode of thought so strongly rooted in human prejudices and partialities of its mere speculative support, goes but a very little way towards overcoming it; but though only a step, it is a quite indispensable one; for since, after all, prejudice can only be successfully combated by philosophy, no way can really be made against it permanently, until it has been shown not to have philosophy on its side' (pp. 225-227).

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This was to lay the basis of a true positivism by the only means through which it can be laid firmly. It was to establish at the bottom of men's minds the habit of seeking explanations of all phenomena in experience, and building up from the beginning the great positive principle that we can only know phenomena, and can only know them experientially. We see, from such passages as the two that have been quoted, that with Mr. Mill, no less than with Comte, the ultimate object was to bring people to extend positive modes of thinking to the master subjects of morals, politics, and religion. Mr. Mill, however, with a wisdom which Comte unfortunately did not share, refrained from any rash and premature attempt to decide what would be the results of this much-needed extension. He knew that we were as yet only just coming in sight of the stage where these most complex of all phenomena can be fruitfully studied on positive methods, and he was content with doing as much as he could to expel other methods from men's minds, and to engender the positive spirit and temper. Comte, on the other hand, presumed at once to draw up a minute plan of social reconstruction, which contains some ideas of great beauty and power, some of extreme absurdity, and some which would be very mischievous if there were the smallest chance of their ever being realised. 'His book stands,' Mr. Mill truly says of the *System of Positive Polity*, 'a monumental warning to thinkers on society and politics of what happens when once men lose sight in their speculations of the value of Liberty and Individuality' (p. 213).

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It was his own sense of the value of Liberty which led to the production of the little tractate which Mr. Mill himself thought likely to survive longer than anything else that he had written, 'with the possible exception of the *Logic*,' as being 'a kind of philosophic text-book of a single truth, which the changes progressively taking place in modern society tend to bring out into ever stronger relief; the importance to man and society, of a large variety in types of character, and of giving full freedom to human nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions' (p. 253). It seems to us, however, that Mr. Mill's plea for Liberty in the abstract, invaluable as it is, still is less important than the memorable application of this plea, and of all the arguments supporting it, to that half of the human race whose individuality has hitherto been blindly and most wastefully repressed. The little book on the *Subjection of Women*, though not a capital performance like the *Logic*, was the capital illustration of the modes of reasoning about human character set forth in his *Logic* applied to the case in which the old metaphysical notion of innate and indelible differences is still nearly as strong as ever it was, and in which its moral and social consequences are so inexpressibly disastrous, so superlatively powerful in keeping the ordinary level of the aims and achievements of life low and meagre. The accurate and unanswerable reasoning no less than the noble elevation of this great argument; the sagacity of a hundred of its maxims on individual conduct and character, no less than the combined rationality and beauty of its aspirations for the improvement of collective social life, make this piece probably the best illustration of all the best and richest qualities of its author's mind, and it is fortunate that a subject of such incomparable importance should have been first effectively presented for discussion in so worthy and pregnant a form.

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It is interesting to know definitely from the Autobiography, what is implied in the opening of the book itself, that a zealous belief in the advantages of abolishing the legal and social inequalities of women was not due to the accident of personal intimacy with one or two more women of exceptional distinction of character. What has been ignorantly supposed in our own day to be a crotchet of Mr. Mill's was the common doctrine of the younger proselytes of the Benthamite school, and Bentham himself was wholly with them (*Autobiography*, p. 105, and also 244); as, of course, were other thinkers of an earlier date, Condorcet for instance.^[4] In this as in other subjects Mr. Mill did not go beyond his modest definition of his own originality—the application of old ideas in new forms and connections (p. 119), or the originality 'which every thoughtful mind gives to its own mode of conceiving and expressing truths which are common property' (p. 254). Or shall we say that he had an originality of a more genuine kind, which made him first diligently acquire what in an excellent phrase he calls *plenary possession* of truths, and then transfuse them with a sympathetic and contagious enthusiasm?

It is often complained that the book on Women has the radical imperfection of not speaking plainly on the question of the limitations proper to divorce. The present writer once ventured to ask Mr. Mill why he had left this important point undiscussed. Mr. Mill replied that it seemed to him impossible to settle the expediency of more liberal conditions of divorce, 'first, without hearing much more fully than we could possibly do at present the ideas held by women in the matter; second, until the experiment of marriage with entire equality between man and wife had been properly tried.' People who are in a hurry to get rid of their partners may find this very halting kind of work, and a man who wants to take a new wife before sunset, may well be irritated by a philosopher who tells him that the question may possibly be capable of useful discussion towards the middle of the next century. But Mr. Mill's argument is full of force and praiseworthy patience.

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The union of boundless patience with unshaken hope was one of Mr. Mill's most conspicuous distinctions. There are two crises in the history of grave and sensitive natures. One on the threshold of manhood, when the youth defines his purpose, his creed, his aspirations; the other towards the later part of middle life, when circumstance has strained his purpose, and tested his creed, and given to his aspirations a cold and practical measure. The second crisis, though less stirring, less vivid, less coloured to the imagination, is the weightier probation of the two, for it is final and decisive; it marks not the mere unresisted force of youthful impulse and implanted predispositions, as the earlier crisis does, but rather the resisting quality, the strength, the purity, the depth, of the native character, after the many princes of the power of the air have had time and chance of fighting their hardest against it. It is the turn which a man takes about the age of forty or five-and-forty that parts him off among the sheep on the right hand or the poor goats on the left. This is the time of the grand moral climacteric; when genial unvarnished selfishness, or coarse and ungenial cynicism, or querulous despondency, finally chokes out the generous resolve of a fancied strength which had not yet been tried in the burning fiery furnace of circumstance.

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Mr. Mill did not escape the second crisis, any more than he had escaped the first, though he dismisses it in a far more summary manner. The education, he tells us, which his father had given him with such fine solicitude, had taught him to look for the greatest and surest source of happiness in sympathy with the good of mankind on a large scale, and had fitted him to work for this good of mankind in various ways. By the time he was twenty, his sympathies and passive susceptibilities had been so little cultivated, his analytic quality had been developed with so little balance in the shape of developed feelings, that he suddenly found himself unable to take pleasure in those thoughts of virtue and benevolence which had hitherto only been associated with logical demonstration and not with sympathetic sentiment. This dejection was dispelled

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mainly by the influence of Wordsworth—a poet austere yet gracious, energetic yet sober, penetrated with feeling for nature, yet penetrated with feeling for the homely lot of man. Here was the emotional synthesis, binding together the energies of the speculative and active mind by sympathetic interest in the common feelings and common destiny of human beings.

For some ten years more (1826-1836) Mr. Mill hoped the greatest things for the good of society from reformed institutions. That was the period of parliamentary changes, and such hope was natural and universal. Then a shadow came over this confidence, and Mr. Mill advanced to the position that the choice of political institutions is subordinate to the question, 'what great improvement in life and culture stands next in order for the people concerned, as the condition of their further progress?' (p. 170). In this period he composed the *Logic* (published 1843) and the *Political Economy* (1848). Then he saw what all ardent lovers of improvement are condemned to see, that their hopes have outstripped the rate of progress; that fulfilment of social aspiration is tardy and very slow of foot; and that the leaders of human thought are never permitted to enter into that Promised Land whither they are conducting others. Changes for which he had worked and from which he expected most, came to pass, but, after they had come to pass, they were 'attended with much less benefit to human wellbeing than I should formerly have anticipated, because they had produced very little improvement in that which all real amelioration in the lot of mankind depends on, their intellectual and moral state.... I had learnt from experience that many false opinions may be exchanged for true ones, without in the least altering the habit of mind of which false opinions are the result' (p. 239). This discovery appears to have brought on no recurrence of the dejection which had clouded a portion of his youth. It only set him to consider the root of so disappointing a conclusion, and led to the conviction that a great change in the fundamental constitution of men's modes of thought must precede any marked improvement in their lot. He perceived that society is now passing through a transitional period 'of weak convictions, paralysed intellects, and growing laxity of principle,' the consequence of the discredit in the more reflective minds of the old opinions on the cardinal subjects of religion, morals, and politics, which have now lost most of their efficacy for good, though still possessed of life enough to present formidable obstacles to the growth of better opinion on those subjects (p. 239).

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Thus the crisis of disappointment which breaks up the hope and effort of so many men who start well, or else throws them into poor and sterile courses, proved in this grave, fervent, and most reasonable spirit only the beginning of more serious endeavours in a new and more arduous vein. Hitherto he had been, as he says, 'more willing to be content with seconding the superficial improvements which had begun to take place in the common opinions of society and the world.' Henceforth he kept less and less in abeyance the more heretical part of his opinions, which he began more and more clearly to discern as 'almost the only ones, the assertion of which tends in any way to regenerate society' (p. 230). The crisis of middle age developed a new fortitude, a more earnest intrepidity, a greater boldness of expression about the deeper things, an interest profounder than ever in the improvement of the human lot. The book on the *Subjection of Women*, the *Liberty*, and probably some pieces that have not yet been given to the world, are the notable result of this ripest, loftiest, and most inspiring part of his life.

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This judgment does not appear to be shared by the majority of those who have hitherto published their opinions upon Mr. Mill's life and works. Perhaps it would have been odd if such a judgment had been common. People who think seriously of life and its conditions either are content with those conditions as they exist, or else they find them empty and deeply unsatisfying. Well, the former class, who naturally figure prominently in the public press, because the press is the more or less flattering mirror of the prevailing doctrines of the day, think that Mr. Mill's views of a better social future are chimerical, utopian, and sentimental. The latter class compensate themselves for the pinchedness of the real world about them by certain rapturous ideals, centring in God, a future life, and the long companionship of the blessed. The consequence of this absorption either in the immediate interests and aims of the hour, or in the interests and aims of an imaginary world which is supposed to await us after death, has been a hasty inclination to look on such a life and such purposes as are set forth in the Autobiography as essentially jejune and dreary. It is not in the least surprising that such a feeling should prevail. If it were otherwise, if the majority of thoughtful men and women were already in a condition to be penetrated by sympathy for the life of 'search with many sighs,' then we should have already gone far on our way towards the goal which a Turgot or a Mill set for human progress. If society had at once recognised the full attractiveness of a life arduously passed in consideration of the means by which the race may take its next step forward in the improvement of character and the amelioration of the common lot,—and this not from love of God nor hope of recompense in a world to come, and still less from hope of recompense or even any very firm assurance of fulfilled aspiration in this world,—then that fundamental renovation of conviction for which Mr. Mill sighed, and that evolution of a new faith to which he had looked forward in the far distance, would already have come to pass.

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Mr. Mill has been ungenerously ridiculed for the eagerness and enthusiasm of his contemplation of a new and better state of human society. Yet we have always been taught to consider it the mark of the loftiest and most spiritual character, for one to be capable of rapturous contemplation of a new and better state in a future life. Why, then, do you not recognise the loftiness and spirituality of those who make their heaven in the thought of the wider light and purer happiness that, in the immensity of the ages, may be brought to new generations of men, by long force of vision and endeavour? What great element is wanting in a life guided by such a hope? Is it not disinterested, and magnanimous, and purifying, and elevating? The countless

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beauties of association which cluster round the older faith may make the new seem bleak and chilly. But when what is now the old faith was itself new, that too may well have struck, as we know that it did strike, the adherent of the mellowed pagan philosophy as crude, meagre, jejune, dreary.

Then Mr. Mill's life as disclosed to us in these pages has been called joyless, by that sect of religious partisans whose peculiarity is to mistake boisterousness for unctiousness. Was the life of Christ himself, then, so particularly joyful? Can the life of any man be joyful who sees and feels the tragic miseries and hardly less tragic follies of the earth? The old Preacher, when he considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun, and beheld the tears of such as were oppressed and had no comforter, therefore praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive, and declared him better than both, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun. Those who are willing to trick their understandings and play fast and loose with words may, if they please, console themselves with the fatuous commonplaces of a philosophic optimism. They may, with eyes tight shut, cling to the notion that they live in the best of all possible worlds, or discerning all the anguish that may be compressed into threescore years and ten, still try to accept the Stoic's paradox that pain is not an evil. Or, most wonderful and most common of all, they may find this joy of which they talk, in meditating on the moral perfections of the omnipotent Being for whose diversion the dismal panorama of all the evil work done under the sun was bidden to unfold itself, and who sees that it is very good. Those who are capable of a continuity of joyous emotion on these terms may well complain of Mr. Mill's story as dreary; and so may the school of Solomon, who commended mirth because a man hath no better thing than to eat and to drink and to be merry. People, however, who are prohibited by their intellectual conditions from finding full satisfaction either in spiritual raptures or in pleasures of sense, may think the standard of happiness which Mr. Mill sought and reached, not unacceptable and not unworthy of being diligently striven after.

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Mr. Mill's conception of happiness in life is more intelligible if we contrast it with his father's. The Cynic element in James Mill, as his son now tells us (pg. 48), was that he had scarcely any belief in pleasures; he thought few of them worth the price which has to be paid for them; and he set down the greater number of the miscarriages in life as due to an excessive estimate of them. 'He thought human life a poor thing at best, after the freshness of youth and of unsatisfied curiosity had gone by.... He would sometimes say that if life were made what it might be, by good government and good education, it would be worth having; but he never spoke with anything like enthusiasm even of that possibility.' We should shrink from calling even this theory dreary, associated as it is with the rigorous enforcement of the heroic virtues of temperance and moderation, and the strenuous and careful bracing up of every faculty to face the inevitable and make the best of it. At bottom it is the theory of many of the bravest souls, who fare grimly through life in the mood of leaders of forlorn hopes, denying pleasures, yet very sensible of the stern delight of fortitude. We can have no difficulty in understanding that, when the elder Mill lay dying, 'his interest in all things and persons that had interested him through life was undiminished, nor did the approach of death cause the smallest wavering (as in so strong and firm a mind it was impossible that it should), in his convictions on the subject of religion. His principal satisfaction, after he knew that his end was near, seemed to be the thought of what he had done to make the world better than he found it; and his chief regret in not living longer, that he had not had time to do more' (p. 203).^[5]

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Mr. Mill, however, went beyond this conception. He had a belief in pleasures, and thought human life by no means a poor thing to those who know how to make the best of it. It was essential both to the stability of his utilitarian philosophy, and to the contentment of his own temperament, that the reality of happiness should be vindicated, and he did both vindicate and attain it. A highly pleasurable excitement that should have no end, of course he did not think possible; but he regarded the two constituents of a satisfied life, much tranquillity and some excitement, as perfectly attainable by many men, and as ultimately attainable by very many more. The ingredients of this satisfaction he set forth as follows:—a willingness not to expect more from life than life is capable of bestowing; an intelligent interest in the objects of mental culture; genuine private affections; and a sincere interest in the public good. What, on the other hand, are the hindrances which prevent these elements from being in the possession of every one born in a civilised country? Ignorance; bad laws or customs, debarring a man or woman from the sources of happiness within reach; and 'the positive evils of life, the great sources of physical and mental suffering—such as indigence, disease, and the unkindness, worthlessness, or premature loss of objects of affection.'^[6] But every one of these calamitous impediments is susceptible of the weightiest modification, and some of them of final removal. Mr. Mill had learnt from Turgot and Condorcet—two of the wisest and noblest of men, as he justly calls them (113)—among many other lessons, this of the boundless improvableness of the human lot, and we may believe that he read over many a time the pages in which Condorcet delineated the Tenth Epoch in the history of human perfectibility, and traced out in words of finely reserved enthusiasm the operation of the forces which should consummate the progress of the race. 'All the grand sources of human suffering,' Mr. Mill thought, 'are in a great degree, many of them almost entirely, conquerable by human care and effort; and though their removal is grievously slow—though a long succession of generations will perish in the breach before the conquest is completed, and this world becomes all that, if will and knowledge were not wanting, it might easily be made—yet every mind sufficiently intelligent and generous to bear a part, however small and unobtrusive, in the endeavour, will draw a noble enjoyment from the contest itself, which he would not for any bribe in the form of selfish indulgence consent to be without' (*Utilitarianism*, 22).

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We thus see how far from dreary this wise and benign man actually found his own life; how full it was of cheerfulness, of animation, of persevering search, of a tranquillity lighted up at wholesome intervals by flashes of intellectual and moral excitement. That it was not seldom crossed by moods of despondency is likely enough, but we may at least be sure that these moods had nothing in common with the vulgar despondency of those whose hopes are centred in material prosperity in this world and spiritual prosperity in some other. They were, at least, the dejection of a magnanimous spirit, that could only be cast down by some new hindrance to the spread of reason and enlightenment among men, or some new weakening of their incentives to right doing.

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Much has been said against Mr. Mill's strictures on society, and his withdrawal from it. If we realise the full force of all that he says of his own purpose in life, it is hard to see how either his opinion or his practice could have been different. He ceased to be content with 'seconding the superficial improvements' in common ways of thinking, and saw the necessity of working at a fundamental reconstitution of accepted modes of thought. This in itself implies a condemnation of a social intercourse that rests on the base of conventional ways of looking at things. The better kind of society, it is true, appears to contain two classes; not only the class that will hear nothing said hostile to the greater social conventions, including among these the popular theology, but also another class who will tolerate or even encourage attack on the greater social conventions, and a certain mild discussion of improvements in them—provided only neither attack nor discussion be conducted in too serious a vein. A new idea about God, or property, or the family, is handed round among the company, as ladies of quality in Queen Anne's time handed round a black page or a China monster. In Bishop Butler's phrase, these people only want to know what is said, not what is true. To be in earnest, to show that you mean what you say, to think of drawing blood in the encounter, is thought, and perhaps very naturally thought, to be a piece of bad manners. Social intercourse can only exist either pleasantly or profitably among people who share a great deal of common ground in opinion and feeling. Mr. Mill, no doubt, was always anxious to find as much common ground as he honestly could, for this was one of the most characteristic maxims of his propagandism. But a man who had never been brought up in the popular religion, and who had been brought up in habits of the most scrupulous fair dealing with his own understanding; who had never closed his mind to new truths from likely sources, but whose character was formed, and whose mind was made up, on the central points of opinion, was not in a position to derive much benefit from those who in all respects represent a less advanced stage of mental development. On the other hand, all the benefit which they were in a position to derive from him could be adequately secured by reading what he wrote. Perhaps there is nothing wiser among the wise things written in the Autobiography than the remarks on the fact that persons of any mental superiority, who greatly frequent society, are greatly deteriorated by it. 'Not to mention loss of time, the tone of their feelings is lowered: they become less in earnest about those of their opinions respecting which they must remain silent in the society they frequent: they come to look on their most elevated objects as unpractical, or at least too remote from realisation to be more than a vision or a theory: and if, more fortunate than most, they retain their higher principles unimpaired, yet with respect to the persons and affairs of their own day, they insensibly adopt the modes of feeling and judgment in which they can hope for sympathy from the company they keep' (p. 228). That a man loses something, nay, that he loses much, by being deprived of animating intercourse with other men, Mr. Mill would probably have been the first to admit. Where that intercourse can be had, nothing is more fit to make the judgment robust, nothing more fit to freshen and revive our interests, and to clothe them with reality. Even second-rate companionship has some clear advantages. The question is, whether these advantages outweigh the equally clear disadvantages. Mr. Mill was persuaded that they do not.

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Those whom disgust at the aimlessness and insignificance of most of our social intercourse may dispose to withdrawal from it—and their number will probably increase as the reaction against intellectual flippancy goes on—will do well to remember that Mr. Mill's retirement and his vindication of it sprang from no moral valetudinarianism. He did not retire to gratify any self-indulgent whim, but only in order to work the more uninterruptedly *and definitely*. The Autobiography tells us what pains he took to keep himself informed of all that was going on in every part of the world. 'In truth, the modern facilities of communication have not only removed all the disadvantages, to a political writer in tolerably easy circumstances, of distance from the scene of political action, but have converted them into advantages. The immediate and regular receipt of newspapers and periodicals keeps him *au courant* of even the most temporary politics, and gives him a much more correct view of the state and progress of opinion than he could acquire by personal contact with individuals; for every one's social intercourse is more or less limited to particular sets or classes, whose impressions and no others reach him through that channel; and experience has taught me that those who give their time to the absorbing claims of what is called society, not having leisure to keep up a large acquaintance with the organs of opinion, remain much more ignorant of the general state either of the public mind, or of the active and instructed part of it, than a recluse who reads the newspapers need be. There are, no doubt, disadvantages in too long a separation from one's country—in not occasionally renewing one's impressions of the light in which men and things appear when seen from a position in the midst of them; but the deliberate judgment formed at a distance, and undisturbed by inequalities of perspective, is the most to be depended on, even for application in practice. Alternating

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between the two positions, I combined the advantages of both.' Those who knew him will perhaps agree that he was more widely and precisely informed of the transactions of the day, in every department of activity all over the world, than any other person of their acquaintance. People should remember, further, that though Mr. Mill saw comparatively little of men after a certain time, yet he was for many years of his life in constant and active relations with men. It was to his experience in the Indian Office that he attributed some of his most serviceable qualities, especially this: 'I learnt how to obtain the best I could, when I could not obtain everything; instead of being indignant or dispirited because I could not have entirely my own way, to be pleased and encouraged when I could have the smallest part of it; and when even that could not be, to bear with complete equanimity the being overruled altogether' (pp. 85, 86). In these words we seem almost to hear the modest and simple tones of the writer's own voice.

FOOTNOTES

- [1] April 5, 1873.
- [2] Mill's *Autobiography*, 242.
- [3] In an interesting volume (*The Minor Works of George Grote*, edited by Alexander Bain. London: Murray), we find Grote confirming Mr. Mill's estimate of his father's psychagogic quality. 'His unpremeditated oral exposition,' says Grote of James Mill, 'was hardly less effective than his prepared work with the pen; his colloquial fertility in philosophical subjects, his power of discussing himself, and stimulating others to discuss, his ready responsive inspirations through all the shifts and windings of a sort of Platonic dialogue,—all these accomplishments were to those who knew him, even more impressive than what he composed for the press. Conversation with him was not merely instructive, but provocative to the observant intelligence. Of all persons whom we have known, Mr. James Mill was the one who stood least remote from the lofty Platonic ideal of Dialectic—του διδόναι και δέχεσθαι λόγον (the giving and receiving of reasons)—competent alike to examine others or to be examined by them in philosophy. When to this we add a strenuous character, earnest convictions, and single-minded devotion to truth, with an utter disdain of mere paradox, it may be conceived that such a man exercised powerful intellectual ascendancy over youthful minds,' etc.—*Minor Works of George Grote*, p. 284.
- [4] Condorcet's arguments the reader will find in vol. i. of the present series of these *Critical Miscellanies*, p. 249.
- [5] For the mood in which death was faced by another person who had renounced theology and the doctrine of a future state of consciousness, see Miss Martineau's *Autobiography*, ii. 435, etc.
- [6] For this exposition see *Utilitarianism*, pp. 18-24.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CRITICAL MISCELLANIES, (VOL. 3 OF 3),
ESSAY 2: THE DEATH OF MR MILL; ESSAY 3: MR MILL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY ***

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