

***PHILIP GILBERT
HAMERTON***



***HUMAN
INTERCOURSE***

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Human Intercourse

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PREFACE.

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When this book was begun, some years ago, I made a formal plan, according to which it was to have been one long Essay or Treatise, divided into sections and chapters, and presenting that apparently perfect *ordonnance* which gives such an imposing air to a work of art. I say “apparently perfect *ordonnance*,” because in such cases the perfection of the arrangement is often only apparent, and the work is like those formal pseudo-classical buildings that seem, with their regular columns, spaces, and windows, the very highest examples of method; but you find on entering that the internal distribution of space is defective and inconvenient, that one room has a window in a corner and another half a window, that one is needlessly large for its employment and another far too small. In literature the ostentation of order may compel an author to extreme condensation in one part of his book and to excessive amplification in another, since, in reality, the parts of his subject do not fall more naturally into equal divisions than words beginning with different letters in the dictionary. I therefore soon abandoned external rigidity of order, and made my divisions more elastic; but I went still further after some experiments, and abandoned the idea of a Treatise. This was not done without some regret, as I know that a Treatise has a better chance of permanence than a collection of Essays; but, in this case, I met with an invisible obstacle that threatened to prevent good literary execution. After making some progress I felt that the work was not very

readable, and that the writing of it was not a satisfactory occupation. Whenever this happens there is sure to be an error of method somewhere. What the error was in this case I did not discover for a long time, but at last I suddenly perceived it. A formal Treatise, to be satisfactory, can only be written about ascertained or ascertainable laws; and human intercourse as it is carried on between individuals, though it looks so accessible to every observer, is in reality a subject of infinite mystery and obscurity, about which hardly anything is known, about which certainly nothing is known absolutely and completely. I found that every attempt to ascertain and proclaim a law only ended, when the supposed law was brought face to face with nature, by discovering so many exceptions that the best practical rules were suspension of judgment and a reliance upon nothing but special observation in each particular case. I found that in real human intercourse the theoretically improbable, or even the theoretically impossible, was constantly happening. I remember a case in real life which illustrates this very forcibly. A certain English lady, influenced by the received ideas about human intercourse which define the conditions of it in a hard and sharp manner, was strongly convinced that it would be impossible for her to have friendly relations with another lady whom she had never seen, but was likely to see frequently. All her reasons would be considered excellent reasons by those who believe in maxims and rules. It was plain that there could be nothing in common. The other lady was neither of the same country, nor of the same religious and political parties, nor exactly of the same class, nor of the same generation. These facts

were known, and the inference deduced from them was that intercourse would be impossible. After some time the English lady began to perceive that the case did not bear out the supposed rules; she discovered that the younger lady might be an acceptable friend. At last the full strange truth became apparent,—that she was singularly well adapted, better adapted than any other human being, to take a filial relation to the elder, especially in times of sickness, when her presence was a wonderful support. Then the warmest affection sprang up between the two, lasting till separation by death and still cherished by the survivor. What becomes of rules and maxims and wise old saws in the face of nature and reality? What can we do better than to observe nature with an open, unprejudiced mind, and gather some of the results of observation?

I am conscious of several omissions that may possibly be rectified in another volume if this is favorably accepted. The most important of these are the influence of age on intercourse, and the effects of living in the same house, which are not invariably favorable. Both these subjects are very important, and I have not time to treat them now with the care they would require. There ought also to have been a careful study of the natural antagonisms, which are of terrible importance when people, naturally antagonistic, are compelled by circumstances to live together. These are, however, generally of less importance than the affinities, because we contrive to make our intercourse with antagonistic people as short and rare as possible, and that with sympathetic people as frequent and long as circumstances will permit.

I will not close this preface without saying that the happiness of sympathetic human intercourse seems to me incomparably greater than any other pleasure. I may be supposed to have passed the age of enthusiastic illusions, yet I would at any time rather pass a week with a real friend in any place that afforded simple shelter than with an indifferent person in a palace. In saying this I am thinking of real experiences. One of my friends who is devoted to archæological excavations has often invited me to share his life in a hut or a cottage, and I have invariably found that the pleasure of his society far overbalanced the absence of luxury. On the other hand, I have sometimes endured extreme *ennui* at sumptuous feasts in richly appointed houses. The result of experience, in my case, has been to confirm a youthful conviction that the value of certain persons is not to be estimated by comparison with anything else. I was always a believer, and am so at this day more than ever, in the happiness of genuine human intercourse, but I prefer solitude to the false imitation of it. It is in this as in other pleasures, the better we appreciate the real thing, the less we are disposed to accept the spurious copy as a substitute. By far the greater part of what passes for human intercourse is not intercourse at all, but only acting, of which the highest object and most considerable merit is to conceal the weariness that accompanies its hollow observances.

One sad aspect of my subject has not been touched upon in this volume. It was often present in my thoughts, but I timidly shrank from dealing with it. I might have attempted to show in what manner intercourse is cut short by death. All reciprocity of intercourse is, or appears to be, entirety

cut short by that catastrophe; but those who have talked with us much in former years retain an influence that may be even more constant than our recollection of them. My own recollection of the dead is extremely vivid and clear, and I cultivate it by willingly thinking about them, being especially happy when by some accidental flash of brighter memory a more than usual degree of lucidity is obtained. I accept with resignation the natural law, on the whole so beneficent, that when an organism is no longer able to exist without suffering, or senile decrepitude, it should be dissolved and made insensible of suffering; but I by no means accept the idea that the dead are to be forgotten in order that we may spare ourselves distress. Let us give them their due place, their great place, in our hearts and in our thoughts; and if the sweet reciprocity of human intercourse is no longer possible with those who are silent and asleep, let the memory of past intercourse be still a part of our lives. There are hours when we live with the dead more than with the living, so that without any trace of superstition we feel their old sweet influence acting upon us yet, and it seems as if only a little more were needed to give us "the touch of a vanished hand, and the sound of a voice that is still."

Closely connected with this subject of death is the subject of religious beliefs. In the present state of confusion and change, some causes of which are indicated in this volume, the only plain course for honorable men is to act always in favor of truthfulness, and therefore against hypocrisy, and against those encouragers of hypocrisy who offer social advantages as rewards for it. What may come in

the future we cannot tell, but we may be sure that the best way to prepare for the future is to be honest and candid in the present. There are two causes which are gradually effecting a great change, and as they are natural causes they are irresistibly powerful. One is the process of analytic detachment, by which sentiments and feelings once believed to be religious are now found to be separable from religion. If a French peasant has a feeling for architecture, poetry, or music, or an appreciation of eloquence, or a desire to hear a kind of moral philosophy, he goes to the village church to satisfy these dim incipient desires. In his case these feelings and wants are all confusedly connected with religion; in ours they are detached from it, and only reconnected with it by accident, we being still aware that there is no essential identity. That is the first dissolving cause. It seems only to affect the externals of religion, but it goes deeper by making the consciously religious state of mind less habitual. The second cause is even more serious in its effects. We are acquiring the habit of explaining everything by natural causes, and of trying to remedy everything by the employment of natural means. Journals dependent on popular approval for the enormous circulation that is necessary to their existence do not hesitate, in clear terms, to express their preference of natural means to the invocation of supernatural agencies. For example, the correspondent of the "Daily News" at Port Said, after describing the annual blessing of the Suez Canal at the Epiphany, observes: "Thus the canal was solemnly blessed. The opinion of the captains of the ships that throng the harbor, waiting until the block adjusts itself, is that it would

be better to widen it." Such an opinion is perfectly modern, perfectly characteristic of our age. We think that steam excavators and dredgers would be more likely to prevent blocks in the Suez Canal than a priest reading prayers out of a book and throwing a golden cross into the sea, to be fished up again by divers. We cannot help thinking as we do: our opinion has not been chosen by us voluntarily, it has been forced upon us by facts that we cannot help seeing, but it deprives us of an opportunity for a religious emotion, and it separates us, on that point, from all those who are still capable of feeling it. I have given considerable space to the consideration of these changes, but not a disproportionate space. They have a deplorable effect on human intercourse by dividing friends and families into different groups, and by separating those who might otherwise have enjoyed friendship unreservedly. It is probable, too, that we are only at the beginning of the conflict, and that in years not immeasurably distant there will be fierce struggles on the most irritating of practical issues. To name but one of these it is probable that there will be a sharp struggle when a strong and determined naturalist party shall claim the instruction of the young, especially with regard to the origin of the race, the beginnings of animal life, and the evidences of intention in nature. Loving, as I do, the amenities of a peaceful and polished civilization much better than angry controversy, I long for the time when these great questions will be considered as settled one way or the other, or else, if they are beyond our intelligence, for the time when they may be classed as insoluble, so that men may work out their destiny

without bitter quarrels about their origin. The present at least is ours, and it depends upon ourselves whether it is to be wasted in vain disputes or brightened by charity and kindness.

HUMAN INTERCOURSE.

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HUMAN INTERCOURSE.

ESSAY I.

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ON THE DIFFICULTY OF DISCOVERING FIXED LAWS.

A book on Human Intercourse might be written in a variety of ways, and amongst them might be an attempt to treat the subject in a scientific manner so as to elucidate those natural laws by which intercourse between human beings must be regulated. If we knew quite perfectly what those laws are we should enjoy the great convenience of being able to predict with certainty which men and women would be able to associate with pleasure, and which would be constrained or repressed in each other's society. Human intercourse would then be as much a positive science as chemistry, in which the effects of bringing substances together can be foretold with the utmost accuracy. Some very distant approach to this scientific state may in certain instances actually be made. When we know the characters of two people with a certain degree of precision we may sometimes predict that they are sure to quarrel, and have

the satisfaction of witnessing the explosion that our own acumen has foretold. To detect in people we know those incompatibilities that are the fatal seeds of future dissension is one of our malicious pleasures. An acute observer really has considerable powers of prediction and calculation with reference to individual human beings, but there his wisdom ends. He cannot deduce from these separate cases any general rules or laws that can be firmly relied upon as every real law of nature can be relied upon, and therefore it may be concluded that such rules are not laws of nature at all, but only poor and untrustworthy substitutes for them.

The reason for this difficulty I take to be the extreme complexity of human nature and its boundless variety, which make it always probable that in every mind which we have not long and closely studied there will be elements wholly unknown to us. How often, with regard to some public man, who is known to us only in part through his acts or his writings, are we surprised by the sudden revelation of characteristics that we never imagined for him and that seem almost incompatible with the better known side of his nature! How much the more, then, are we likely to go wrong in our estimates of people we know nothing about, and how impossible it must be for us to determine how they are likely to select their friends and companions!

Certain popular ideas appear to represent a sort of rude philosophy of human intercourse. There is the common belief, for example, that, in order to associate pleasantly together, people should be of the same class and nearly in the same condition of fortune, but when we turn to real life we find very numerous instances in which this fancied law is

broken with the happiest results. The late Duke of Albany may be mentioned as an example. No doubt his own natural refinement would have prevented him from associating with vulgar people; but he readily associated with refined and cultivated people who had no pretension to rank. His own rank was a power in his hands that he used for good, and he was conscious of it, but it did not isolate him; he desired to know people as they are, and was capable of feeling the most sincere respect for anybody who deserved it. So it is, generally, with all who have the gifts of sympathy and intelligence. Merely to avoid what is disagreeable has nothing to do with pride of station. Vulgar society is disagreeable, which is a sufficient reason for keeping aloof from it. Amongst people of refinement, association or even friendship is possible in spite of differences of rank and fortune.

Another popular belief is that "men associate together when they are interested in the same things." It would, however, be easy to adduce very numerous instances in which an interest in similar things has been a cause of quarrel, when if one of the two parties had regarded those things with indifference, harmonious intercourse might have been preserved. The livelier our interest in anything the more does acquiescence in matters of detail appear essential to us. Two people are both of them extremely religious, but one of them is a Mahometan, and the other a Christian; here the interest in religion causes a divergence, enough in most cases to make intercourse impossible, when it would have been quite possible if both parties had regarded religion with indifference. Bring the two nearer

together, suppose them to be both Christians, they acknowledge one law, one doctrine, one Head of the church in heaven. Yes, but they do not acknowledge the same head of it on earth, for one accepts the Papal supremacy, which the other denies; and their common Christianity is a feeble bond of union in comparison with the forces of repulsion contained in a multitude of details. Two nominal, indifferent Christians who take no interest in theology would have a better chance of agreeing. Lastly, suppose them to be both members of the Church of England, one of the old school, with firm and settled beliefs on every point and a horror of the most distant approaches to heresy, the other of the new school, vague, indeterminate, desiring to preserve his Christianity as a sentiment when it has vanished as a faith, thinking that the Bible is not true in the old sense but only “contains” truth, that the divinity of Christ is “a past issue,”^[1] and that evolution is, on the whole, more probable than direct and intentional creation,—what possible agreement can exist between these two? If they both care about religious topics, and talk about them, will not their disagreement be in exact proportion to the liveliness of their interest in the subject? So in a realm with which I have some acquaintance, that of the fine arts, discord is always probable between those who have a passionate delight in art. Innocent, well-intentioned friends think that because two men “like painting,” they ought to be introduced, as they are sure to amuse each other. In reality, their tastes may be more opposed than the taste of either of them is to perfect indifference. One has a severe taste for beautiful form and an active contempt for picturesque accidents and

romantic associations, the other feels chilled by severe beauty and delights in the picturesque and romantic. If each is convinced of the superiority of his own principles he will deduce from them an endless series of judgments that can only irritate the other.

Seeing that nations are always hostile to each other, always watchfully jealous and inclined to rejoice in every evil that happens to a neighbor, it would appear safe to predict that little intercourse could exist between persons of different nationality. When, however, we observe the facts as they are in real life, we perceive that very strong and durable friendships often exist between men who are not of the same nation, and that the chief obstacle to the formation of these is not so much nationality as difference of language. There is, no doubt, a prejudice that one is not likely to get on well with a foreigner, and the prejudice has often the effect of keeping people of different nationality apart, but when once it is overcome it is often found that very powerful feelings of mutual respect and sympathy draw the strangers together. On the other hand, there is not the least assurance that the mere fact of being born in the same country will make two men regard each other with kindness. An Englishman repels another Englishman when he meets him on the Continent.^[2] The only just conclusion is that nationality affords no certain rule either in favor of intercourse or against it. A man may possibly be drawn towards a foreign nationality by his appreciation of its excellence in some art that he loves, but this is the case only when the excellence is of the peculiar kind that supplies the needs of his own intelligence. The French excel

in painting; that is to say, that many Frenchmen have attained a certain kind of excellence in certain departments of the art of painting. Englishmen and Americans who value that particular kind of excellence are often strongly drawn towards Paris as an artistic centre or capital; and this opening of their minds to French influence in art may admit other French influences at the same time, so that the ultimate effect of a love of art may be a breaking down of the barrier of nationality. It seldom happens that Frenchmen are drawn towards England and America by their love of painting, but it frequently happens that they become in a measure Anglicized or Americanized either by the serious study of nautical science, or by the love of yachting as an amusement, in which they look to England and America both for the most advanced theories and the newest examples.

The nearest approach ever made to a general rule may be the affirmation that likeness is the secret of companionship. This has a great look of probability, and may really be the reason for many associations, but after observing others we might come to the conclusion that an opposite law would be at least equally applicable. We might say that a companion, to be interesting, ought to bring new elements, and not be a repetition of our own too familiar personality. We have enough of ourselves in ourselves; we desire a companion who will relieve us from the bounds of our thoughts, as a neighbor opens his garden to us, and delivers us from our own hedges. But if the unlikeness is so great that mutual understanding is impossible, then it is too great. We fancy that we should like to know this or that

author, because we feel a certain sympathy with him though he is very different from us, but there are other writers whom we do not desire to know because we are aware of a difference too excessive for companionship.

The only approximation to a general law that I would venture to affirm is that the strongest reason why men are drawn together is not identity of class, not identity of race, not a common interest in any particular art or science, but because there is something in their idiosyncrasies that gives a charm to intercourse between the two. What it is I cannot tell, and I have never met with the wise man who was able to enlighten me.

It is not respect for character, seeing that we often respect people heartily without being able to enjoy their society. It is a mysterious suitableness or adaptability, and *how* mysterious it is may be in some degree realized when we reflect that we cannot account for our own preferences. I try to explain to myself, for my own intellectual satisfaction, how and why it is that I take pleasure in the society of one very dear friend. He is a most able, honorable, and high-minded man, but others are all that, and they give me no pleasure. My friend and I have really not very much in common, far less than I have with some perfectly indifferent people. I only know that we are always glad to be together, that each of us likes to listen to the other, and that we have talked for innumerable hours. Neither does my affection blind me to his faults. I see them as clearly as if I were his enemy, and doubt not that he sees mine. There is no illusion, and there has been no change in our sentiments for twenty years.

As a contrast to this instance I think of others in which everything seems to have been prepared on purpose for facility of intercourse, in which there is similarity of pursuits, of language, of education, of every thing that is likely to permit men to talk easily together, and yet there is some obstacle that makes any real intercourse impossible. What the obstacle is I am unable to explain even to myself. It need not be any unkind feeling, nor any feeling of disapprobation; there may be good-will on both sides and a mutual desire for a greater degree of intimacy, yet with all this the intimacy does not come, and such intercourse as we have is that of simple politeness. In these cases each party is apt to think that the other is reserved, when there is no wish to be reserved but rather a desire to be as open as the unseen obstacle will allow. The existence of the obstacle does not prevent respect and esteem or even a considerable degree of affection. It divides people who seem to be on the most friendly terms; it divides even the nearest relations, brother from brother, and the son from the father. Nobody knows exactly what it is, but we have a word for it,—we call it incompatibility. The difficulty of going farther and explaining the real nature of incompatibility is that it takes as many shapes as there are varieties in the characters of mankind.

Sympathy and incompatibility,—these are the two great powers that decide for us whether intercourse is to be possible or not, but the causes of them are dark mysteries that lie undiscovered far down in the “abysmal deeps of personality.”

ESSAY II.

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INDEPENDENCE.

There is an illusory and unattainable independence which is a mere dream, but there is also a reasonable and attainable independence not really inconsistent with our obligations to humanity and our country.

The dependence of the individual upon the race has never been so fully recognized as now, so that there is little fear of its being overlooked. The danger of our age, and of the future, is rather that a reasonable and possible independence should be made needlessly difficult to attain and to preserve.

The distinction between the two may be conveniently illustrated by a reference to literary production. Every educated man is dependent upon his own country for the language that he uses; and again, that language is itself dependent on other languages from which it is derived; and, farther, the modern author is indebted for a continual stimulus and many a suggestion to the writings of his predecessors, not in his own country only but in far distant lands. He cannot, therefore, say in any absolute way, "My books are my own," but he may preserve a certain mental independence which will allow him to say that with truth in a relative sense. If he expresses himself such as he is, an idiosyncrasy affected but not annihilated by education, he may say that his books are his own.

Few English authors have studied past literature more willingly than Shelley and Tennyson, and none are more original. In these cases idiosyncrasy has been affected by

education, but instead of being annihilated thereby it has gained from education the means of expressing its own inmost self more clearly. We have the true Shelley, the born Tennyson, far more perfectly than we should ever have possessed them if their own minds had not been opened by the action of other minds. Culture is like wealth, it makes us more ourselves, it enables us to express ourselves. The real nature of the poor and the ignorant is an obscure and doubtful problem, for we can never know the inborn powers that remain in them undeveloped till they die. In this way the help of the race, so far from being unfavorable to individuality, is necessary to it. Claude helped Turner to become Turner. In complete isolation from art, however magnificently surrounded by the beauties of the natural world, a man does not express his originality as a landscape-painter, he is simply incapable of expressing *anything* in paint.

But now let us inquire whether there may not be cases in which the labors of others, instead of helping originality to express itself, act as a check to it by making originality superfluous.

As an illustration of this possibility I may take the modern railway system. Here we have the labor and ingenuity of the race applied to travelling, greatly to the convenience of the individual, but in a manner which is totally repressive of originality and indifferent to personal tastes. People of the most different idiosyncrasies travel exactly in the same way. The landscape-painter is hurried at speed past beautiful spots that he would like to contemplate at leisure; the archæologist is whirled by the site of a Roman camp that he

would willingly pause to examine; the mountaineer is not permitted to climb the tunnelled hill, nor the swimmer to cross in his own refreshing, natural way the breadth of the iron-spanned river. And as individual tastes are disregarded, so individual powers are left uncultivated and unimproved. The only talent required is that of sitting passively on a seat and of enduring, for hours together, an unpleasant though mitigated vibration. The skill and courage of the horseman, the endurance of the pedestrian, the art of the paddler or the oarsman, are all made superfluous by this system of travelling by machines, in which previous labors of engineers and mechanics have determined everything beforehand. Happily, the love of exercise and enterprise has produced a reaction of individualism against this levelling railway system, a reaction that shows itself in many kinds of slower but more adventurous locomotion and restores to the individual creature his lost independence by allowing him to pause and stop when he pleases; a reaction delightful to him especially in this, that it gives him some pride and pleasure in the use of his own muscles and his own wits. There are still, happily, Englishmen who would rather steer a cutter across the Channel in rough weather than be shot through a long hole in the chalk.

What the railway is to physical motion, settled conventions are to the movements of the mind. Convention is a contrivance for facilitating what we write or speak by which we are relieved from personal effort and almost absolved from personal responsibility. There are men whose whole art of living consists in passing from one conventionalism to another as a traveller changes his train.

Such men may be envied for the skill with which they avoid the difficulties of life. They take their religion, their politics, their education, their social and literary opinions, all as provided by the brains of others, and they glide through existence with a minimum of personal exertion. For those who are satisfied with easy, conventional ways the desire for intellectual independence is unintelligible. What is the need of it? Why go, mentally, on a bicycle or in a canoe by your own toilsome exertions when you may sit so very comfortably in the train, a rug round your lazy legs and your softly capped head in a corner?

The French ideal of "good form" is to be undistinguishable from others; by which it is not understood that you are to be undistinguishable from the multitude of poor people, but one of the smaller crowd of rich and fashionable people. Independence and originality are so little esteemed in what is called "good society" in France that the adjectives "*indépendant*" and "*original*" are constantly used in a bad sense. "*Il est très indépendant*" often means that the man is of a rude, insubordinate, rebellious temper, unfitting him for social life. "*Il est original,*" or more contemptuously, "*C'est un original,*" means that the subject of the criticism has views of his own which are not the fashionable views, and which therefore (whatever may be their accuracy) are proper objects of well-bred ridicule.

I cannot imagine any state of feeling more destructive of all interest in human intercourse than this, for if on going into society I am only to hear the fashionable opinions and sentiments, what is the gain to me who know them too well

already? I could even repeat them quite accurately with the proper conventional tone, so why put myself to inconvenience to hear that dull and wearisome play acted over again? The only possible explanation of the pleasure that French people of some rank appear to take in hearing things, which are as stale as they are inaccurate, repeated by every one they know, is that the repetition of them appears to be one of the signs of gentility, and to give alike to those who utter them and to those who hear, the profound satisfaction of feeling that they are present at the mysterious rites of Caste.

There is probably no place in the whole world where the feeling of mental independence is so complete as it is in London. There is no place where differences of opinion are more marked in character or more frank and open in expression; but what strikes one as particularly admirable in London is that in the present day (it has not always been so) men of the most opposite opinions and the most various tastes can profess their opinions and indulge their tastes without inconvenient consequences to themselves, and there is hardly any opinion, or any eccentricity, that excludes a man from pleasant social intercourse if he does not make himself impossible and intolerable by bad manners. This independence gives a savor to social intercourse in London that is lamentably wanting to it elsewhere. There is a strange and novel pleasure (to one who lives habitually in the country) in hearing men and women say what they think without deference to any local public opinion.

In many small places this local public opinion is so despotic that there is no individual independence in society, and it then becomes necessary that a man who values his independence, and desires to keep it, should learn the art of living contentedly outside of society.

It has often occurred to me to reflect that there are many men in London who enjoy a pleasant and even a high social position, who live with intelligent people, and even with people of great wealth and exalted rank, and yet who, if their lot had been cast in certain small provincial towns, would have found themselves rigorously excluded from the upper local circles, if not from all circles whatsoever.

I have sometimes asked myself, when travelling on the railway through France, and visiting for a few hours one of those sleepy little old cities, to me so delightful, in which the student of architecture and the lover of the picturesque find so much to interest them, what would have been the career of a man having, for example, the capacity and the convictions of Mr. Gladstone, if he had passed all the years of his manhood in such a place.

It commonly happens that when Nature endows a man with a vigorous personality and its usual accompaniment, an independent way of seeing things, she gives him at the same time powerful talents with which to defend his own originality; but in a small and ancient city, where everything is traditional, intellectual force is of no avail, and learning is of no use. In such a city, where the upper class is an exclusive caste impenetrable by ideas, the eloquence of Mr. Gladstone would be ineffectual, and if exercised at all would be considered in bad taste. His learning, even, would tend to

separate him from the unlearned local aristocracy. The simple fact that he is in favor of parliamentary government, without any more detailed information concerning his political opinions, would put him beyond the pale, for parliamentary government is execrated by the French rural aristocracy, who tolerate nothing short of a determined monarchical absolutism. His religious views would be looked upon as those of a low Dissenter, and it would be remembered against him that his father was in trade. Such is the difference, as a field for talent and originality, between London and an aristocratic little French city, that those very qualities which have raised our Prime Minister to a not undeserved pre-eminence in the great place would have kept him out of society in the small one. He might, perhaps, have talked politics in some café with a few shop-keepers and attorneys.

It may be objected that Mr. Gladstone, as an English Liberal, would naturally be out of place in France and little appreciated there, so I will take the cases of a Frenchman in France and an Englishman in England. A brave French officer, who was at the same time a gentleman of ancient lineage and good estate, chose (for reasons of his own which had no connection with social intercourse) to live upon a property that happened to be situated in a part of France where the aristocracy was strongly Catholic and reactionary. He then found himself excluded from "good society," because he was a Protestant and a friend to parliamentary government. Reasons of this kind, or the counter-reasons of Catholicism and disapprobation of parliaments, would not exclude a polished and amiable

gentleman from society in London. I have read in a biographical notice of Sidney Dobell that when he lived at Cheltenham he was excluded from the society of the place because his parents were Dissenters and he had been in trade.

In cases of this kind, where exclusion is due to hard prejudices of caste or of religion, a man who has all the social gifts of good manners, kind-heartedness, culture, and even wealth, may find himself outside the pale if he lives in or near a small place where society is a strong little clique well organized on definitely understood principles. There are situations in which exclusion of that kind means perfect solitude. It may be argued that to escape solitude the victim has nothing to do but associate with a lower class, but this is not easy or natural, especially when, as in Dobell's case, there is intellectual culture. Those who have refined manners and tastes and a love for intellectual pursuits, usually find themselves disqualified for entering with any real heartiness and enjoyment into the social life of classes where these tastes are undeveloped, and where the thoughts flow in two channels,—the serious channel, studded with anxieties about the means of existence, and the humorous channel, which is a diversion from the other. Far be it from me to say anything that might imply any shade of contempt or disapprobation of the humorous spirit that is Nature's own remedy for the evils of an anxious life. It does more for the mental health of the middle classes than could be done by the most sublimated culture; and if anything concerning it is a subject for regret it is that culture makes us incapable of enjoying poor jokes. It is,

however, a simple matter of fact that although men of great culture may be humorists (Mr. Lowell is a brilliant example), their humor is both more profound in the serious intention that lies under it, and vastly more extensive in the field of its operations than the trivial humor of the uneducated; whence it follows that although humor is the faculty by which different classes are brought most easily into cordial relations, the humorist who has culture will probably find himself *à l'étroit* with humorists who have none, whilst the cultured man who has no humor, or whose humorous tendencies have been overpowered by serious thought, is so terribly isolated in uneducated society that he feels less alone in solitude. To realize this truth in its full force, the reader has only to imagine John Stuart Mill trying to associate with one of those middle-class families that Dickens loved to describe, such as the Wardle family in *Pickwick*.

It follows from these considerations that unless a man lives in London, or in some other great capital city, he may easily find himself so situated that he must learn the art of being happy without society.

As there is no pleasure in military life for a soldier who fears death, so there is no independence in civil existence for the man who has an overpowering dread of solitude.

There are two good reasons against the excessive dread of solitude. The first is that solitude is very rarely so absolute as it appears from a distance; and the second is that when the evil is real, and almost complete, there are palliatives that may lessen it to such a degree as to make it,

at the worst, supportable, and at the best for some natures even enjoyable in a rather sad and melancholy way.

Let us not deceive ourselves with conventional notions on the subject. The world calls "solitude" that condition in which a man lives outside of "society," or, in other words, the condition in which he does not pay formal calls and is not invited to state dinners and dances. Such a condition may be very lamentable, and deserving of polite contempt, but it need not be absolute solitude.

Absolute solitude would be the state of Crusoe on the desert island, severed from human kind and never hearing a human voice; but this is not the condition of any one in a civilized country who is out of a prison cell. Suppose that I am travelling in a country where I am a perfect stranger, and that I stay for some days in a village where I do not know a soul. In a surprisingly short time I shall have made acquaintances and begun to acquire rather a home-like feeling in the place. My new acquaintances may possibly not be rich and fashionable: they may be the rural postman, the innkeeper, the stone-breaker on the roadside, the radical cobbler, and perhaps a mason or a joiner and a few more or less untidy little children; but every morning their greeting becomes more friendly, and so I feel myself connected still with that great human race to which, whatever may be my sins against the narrow laws of caste and class, I still unquestionably belong. It is a positive advantage that our meetings should be accidental and not so long as to involve any of the embarrassments of formal social intercourse, as I could not promise myself that the attempt to spend a whole evening with these humble friends might not cause