SOME MUSINGS OF AN IDLE MAN.

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Some friendly critics tell me that my contributions under this title are difficult reading, too philosophical and beyond them. More than one say, Cannot you give us something light, suggestive of a happy day rather than of a mournful end? I do not know what the Editor will say, but I leave the decision to him of publishing this instalment, which, admittedly, is couched in a lighter vein and devoid of science, philosophy and professionalism. One has rummaged through old note-books and found some odds and ends jotted down in idle moments. In this way this article has almost composed itself. "Thoughts that breathe" will not always make written "words that burn," for these are apt to cool down as they are traced on paper. Still, the Journal is welcome to my musings and I have but one fear, and that is the danger which lurks behind and beneath all writings of the kind—namely, egotism. A further risk is that pages like these are ever ready to receive the perilous confidences of self-complacency, like an old lady's humble companion or the father confessor of a voluble devotee. To quote the blunt truth enunciated by that shrewd and caustic lady, Madame de Sévigny, one remembers on aime tant à parler de soi.

I.

A fear has just been expressed of egotism; but why not egoism? Wherein do they differ? The one is a weakness of temperament, the other a vice. The one arouses ridicule, for it is frequently absurd; the other inspires aversion, for it is unsocial. "Egoism is a modern product in the main, but the vice must have shown itself individually in all ages. The egoist is one who, uncalled by necessity for exertion and led by nurture to resolve all things into self, feels no value for public opinion or, feeling it, believes himself above it. Devoid of warm affection and independent of all sympathy, he is ever on the side of good form or taste because no predominant impulse leads him to its violation. He is a type who breaks no conventions nor shocks a prejudice, but, devoted to self-gratification, never seeks it by any greater risk than is consistent with his habitual ease and place in society. Fortunately, the egoist is rare, and although the psychological causes of egoism
must exist in all classes, yet the true egoist must be sought especially among fashionable idlers who, if not occupied with themselves, have nothing else to be busied about.

On the other hand, egotism is of all ages, and the egotist must be a very vain man, though often a gifted and generally an amiable one. The trouble which the egotist takes to court public suffrage is a proof that he values opinion and, if he had many serious defects to hide, he would not so freely give himself up to public inspection. When accompanied by ability, egotism is infinite in its resources. When it cannot talk it exhibits, and for ever must be holding the stage. Heroes make excellent egotists; they bring their excuse with them and render their vanity respectable by the events on which it is founded. How well Shakespeare realized this when he made the egotism of the Moor win Desdemona, in spite of his colour. Gossip relates that a certain Judge Erskine was so noted for talking about himself that he was nicknamed Counsellor Ego. Possibly, he could scarcely have chosen a more interesting subject. Nearly all actors and actresses are apt to be egotists; they live so much before the public that they suppose the world to be always engaged with them, and yet live in so small a world that their sphere of observation is limited to themselves, their calling, their successes and their failures both before and behind the scenes. The highest order of egotism, and by far the most delightful, is autobiography. When the life of the writer is mere pretentious mediocrity, it is an impertinence and meets its just reward in oblivion; but the egotism of genius, when associated with great public events, is a debt which must be paid to posterity. In so thinking, one recalls the memoirs of the great men who have written and the agreeable women who have left behind those charming pictures of themselves and the society in which they moved. In the long list of biographical egotism, two men ever seem to have escaped clean; the one was Julius Caesar, with his third person so familiar to us at school, a tactician in taste as in war, and Napoleon who ever talks of his ambitions and military combinations in a way that makes the individuality of the man disappear before his intellectual personality. In our own profession, it is to be feared there is much egotism, and to that weakness possibly is due the filling of many pages of our professional literature. It was said of Napoleon that he was but the half of a great man. Surely that is more than can be said of every hero or of most men who wish to stand prominently before the world. The verdict of posterity probably will be that the greater number are not more than a fourth part of a great man. So much for egotism.
In the mess in which I live, there is a man who has a laugh which is like no other man's laugh. True, it is the expression of its owner's hilarity, but is at once so hard, unmusical, forced and non-infectious that it gets on one's nerves. Sitting as one has to and listen to the raucous guffaw of our messmate, it has been impossible to refrain from thoughts on the whole commonplace phenomenon of laughing. In the first place, there is the plain, simple, natural and obvious laugh of the ordinary man; we all understand that, because it is unstudied, unlaboured and instinctive, and one which we can label as "the soul of pleasure and the child of mirth." That laugh has nothing to do with scientific niceties or artificial distinctions; it comes by nature, is a true expression of feeling, and though its motives are doubtful they are really nobody's business and to be disregarded. Its great charm is its very obvious spontaneity and its inherent sympathy which makes it infectious. From this point of view, a natural and good laugh is the unique case in which the quality of infectivity is an asset and not a disability.

The laugh of the man who inspired these notes is what some would call "a horse's laugh." Now, inasmuch as horses do not laugh, the word horse used in this connexion has no reference to our equine friend; it seems just as much appropriate as the use of the same word when we talk of horse-radish, in spite of the fact that horses do not eat either that vegetable or the horse-chestnut. The word horse seems merely to convey an idea of the tremendous energy of this kind of laugh, very much as one describes the strength of a steam engine in terms of so many of those animals. Possibly, the idea conveyed is about as definite and as well understood by people in general in the one case as in the other. Watching my friend, one realizes that, to achieve this species of laugh, the mouth is opened to its fullest extent with the head thrown back to quite forty-five degrees, and the laugh emitted in a rapid series of explosions. There is none of the crushed pumpkin sort of sound which frequently accompanies the ordinary laugh; the tone is clear and sonorous, like something between a shout and a roar. It always seems to me to be an illogical laugh, because its exciting cause is so very often ludicrously disproportionate to the effect. If it were a logical or scientifically produced laugh, surely its cause might be supposed capable of exciting the risibilities of the sagacious quadruped whose name it bears, were he possessed of the requisite cachinnatory organs. So ponderous is this laugh that one
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looks instinctively for some specially wonderful cause, such as an elephant booking his own trunk at a baggage office, or a man falling down and treading on his own nose; but, alas! it rises from nothing so unusual and humorous.

Another man at our table has the "half-laugh" and presents a true contrast to the quadrupedal convulsion of the other. This half laugh is a sort of sizzling and bears the same relation to the whole laugh that a whisper does to an audible tone. In uttering it, the producer opens his mouth very slightly, but he has an imitator, possessed of very good teeth, who opens his mouth wide. Both exponents make their laugh more effective by a trick of tilting the head a little on one side and partially closing the left eye, very much as a hen looks into a basket full of corn. The half laugh of these men suggests the analogy of half a pair of fire-tongs, of which it may be said it is of no use to anyone but the owner, and not at all calculated to act as a substitute for the whole pair. It is the sort of laugh one raises when the General Officer Commanding makes a bad joke or when trying to say a good thing oneself and missing it, you try to cover your retreat and hide discomfiture by appearing highly delighted yourself.

These reflections remind one that some men have the trick of laughing out of the corner of their mouth. In performing this feat, the mouth is pertinaciously closed except at one extremity. Whether it be the right or left corner of the mouth which is left slightly open for the emission of the characteristic sound depends on the circumstances. A man laughs out of the right side of his mouth and generally tilts it up when he is anxious not to laugh, and yet does so; or he wishes to conceal the fact that he is laughing at all, as when some familiar friend succeeds in making a fool of himself, or some one nearly rips a skirt off a lady's waist by treading on her train. The laugh from the left corner of the mouth is usually associated with a drawing down or doubling under of that buccal extremity. The point of variance between these laughs is the difference between up and down. The tone emitted is not very different from the others, but the symptoms suggest that its production requires a decided effort and is therefore hardly involuntary. This laugh is the refuge of the man who wishes to laugh but cannot bring it about, and means too often an attempt to conceal his chagrin at having most egregiously made an ass of himself. Quite a different affair is the laugh in the sleeve. The knowledge of its existence is confined generally to the individual indulging in it and its effects are not apparent. This laugh is
taken internally and privately, like a drink behind the door, and is altogether a selfish affair. It indicates a high degree of self-complacency and finds no response in others. Besides these varieties of laughter, we have the grin and smile. These do not amount to much as contributors to general hilarity but, to the observant, familiar examples are the smile of derision, the triumphant smile, the smile of superiority and the approving or encouraging smile; all these resolve themselves into so many smiles for, to, and with a man.

We all know how difficult it is to draw tears from blockheads, except they be fuddled with drink and more or less maudlin. Still more difficult is it to draw a sympathetic tear from the self-sufficient. In both cases it is as difficult to raise a sympathetic or intelligent laugh; and, after all, surely the gift of laughing heartily and sympathetically is a proof of feeling equal to that of crying? Alas, for those who neither laugh nor weep, and doubly alas for those obliged to live with them. The more one thinks over it, the more impressed one becomes that there is an immense variety and character in laughter. Who does not recall the woman whose laugh is more beautiful than her face, and who can deny that her friends are all the richer thereby? One could write much on this subject, but refrain for fear of being laughed at. It would be an interesting diversion to prepare a catalogue of people who have died smiling and laughing, and still more interesting to know why they laughed or smiled:

III.

I may truly describe myself as a voracious reader of books, including novels, and nothing impresses me more than the difficulty there is to find a really good book in these days. This evil of bad books is probably no novelty. Whoever runs his eye over a catalogue, will be convinced that, in all ages, the number of really useful and valuable works bore no very large proportion to the entire mass of literature. Many of us are apt to imagine that Ovid, Virgil, Horace, Shakespeare, Milton, Johnson and many others who have written fine books had the whole field to themselves, and that the literary effort of their days was confined only to their fine works. The unrolling of manuscripts recovered from the ruins of Pompeii, has proved that trash was written then as now; it may, further, be questioned whether, at the burning of the library of Alexandria, there were a hundred volumes utterly lost to the world which were not more serviceable as fuel for the baths than as food for the mind.
It is easy and tempting to act as censor of our modern literature, and say there are no more Shakespeares, Miltons, Bacons and Jeremy Taylors. But, is it reasonable? We might as well lament that there are no more knights-errant or cross-bowman. Every age knows its own wants and provides for them. Possibly, Milton would not succeed much better, were he to reappear in this twentieth century with a new “Paradise Lost,” than Kipling and other moderns have succeeded with their poems. The hyper-critical or cynical may say that the British publishers are very inventive people for they produce more bad books than the rest of Europe. Apart from the fact that it is doubtful whether that is true, the fact exists that there is much evidence of good books, and of an excellence which society requires. What is to be the standard of that excellence rests with the individual. What suits you may not suit me, and vice versa. A man is drawn by a sort of elective attraction to the works which harmonize with his intellectual peculiarities. That I have experienced a difficulty in finding what I deem good books, may possibly be due to the fact that I am out of joint with the times. Another way of looking at the same question is to say, that the frequency of bad books proves only that fools now employ their leisure in reading, instead of devoting their spare time to games, sports and active exercise. Few would advance such a plea, but I have heard it enunciated.

It may be worth while to consider briefly what has been the history and tendency of modern literary effort. After the development of the printing press, its first efforts were expended in disseminating the accumulated errors of a thousand years, which had previously been in the exclusive possession of the few. Since then, each successive generation has pretty equally divided its time between refuting the mistakes of its predecessors, and popularizing others of its own. Few can deny that pedantry, bad taste and some ignorance infect the earlier writers, notwithstanding their eloquence and energy. What passed for science was scarcely less mischievous than their false morality. Of theology it is dangerous to speak, but of the older medical books it is not unfair to say they were a garbled account of ill-understood facts, supported by a chaos of false inferences and illogical systems. As for law, each particular code was a monument of the barbarity and perversity of our species. Of all the works of imagination, with which the press teemed during the last three centuries; how very few live and are read by ourselves. History has ever been a record of errors, of party squabbles, and of views expressed according to the historian's
fancy. Again, each generation has had its crop of pamphlets, for the most part embodying the interests and views of the moment; these have fretted their little hour on the stage and then been consigned to the dust-bin. The rapid production of books in these times may be attributed to more rapid thinking as well as to more rapid printing; it is doubtful whether a work is really any the worse for being thrown off at high pressure.

Another cause for the multiplication of flimsy books is the universality of authorship; it is the fashion to write. When all sorts and conditions of people must read, all sorts and conditions will, and are tempted to, write; the annual quality of publications is less an exponent of the talent in the market, than of the minimum of wit, sense and utility, beyond which the public will not buy. An order of writers, peculiar to our age, are speculative traders who, treading on the heels of physicians, write books or pamphlets to puff their wares. Even cooks and confectioners can recommend the lightness of their pastry by that of their literary style, or advance the flavour of their wit as an index of that of their ragouts. In Shakespeare’s time, a current phrase was “cutler’s poetry,” and we can boast of anthologies of safety razor makers and composers of soaps.

Reverting to the main theme of these thoughts, and the question whether any real evil exists in this multiplicity and consequent mediocrity of books, it may be asked, if none but good books appeared what would become of the critical reviewers and the outlet for their splenetic vituperation? It is well known that bad books made good reviews, and without the necessary supply of these, many would lose the opportunity of being witty in print. Reflection compels one to think it unreasonable and selfish in the wise or learned to desire that nothing should be published but what suits them; the whole should be amused, although all cannot afford to be wits and philosophers. As for the idea that bad books debase the intellect and morals of the public, one is inclined to think the facts to be the other way, and that it is the public who debauch and encourage the bad writers. Only the silly read silly books and the charge is a mere confounding of cause and effect. Books are, or ought to be, pictures of the human mind, but it is not every publisher and bookseller who will have anything to do with an original thinker, a man of science or a philosopher. Such works may be excellent and even confer a lasting benefit on the race, but they do not sell or, at best, make but a poor and slow return on capital. As an article of trade, we may say of books, that bad
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is best; and he who writes too deeply for his age, might as well write in a foreign language. The mediocre, the foolish and the common place are the publisher’s best customers, and to deprive them of their appropriate reading would be as politically unjust as it is economically impolitic. In literature, as in most things, we want a free trade.

Certain philosophers have explained the existence of moral evil as a necessary point of comparison for appreciating the blessings of life; if so, why may not bad books be tolerated, as contributing to the delight with which we enjoy the few that are worth reading? The same argument applies to error. Truth is caviare and unpalatable to the general public, and if given undiluted might lead to trouble. Looking at the question as a whole, I am disposed to think that few, if any, books are so totally worthless as not to contribute sometimes to the reader’s ideas; and what they do not communicate, they may suggest. One man’s opinion may be true, as it respects another’s, though false to the nature of things. Such opinions are stages on the journey of knowledge, and they may serve the uninformed though the philosopher despises them.

Again, the great output of books; even though many are bad or indifferent, is an instrument of commerce and multitudes are supported by the mere manufacture. It is by the printing of nonsense and ephemeral literature that publishers drive their motor cars, that the revenue is supported, and a host of workers maintained in comfort and independence. Convinced of this, I should feel few qualms of conscience in adding another volume to the mass, even at the risk of its being dull or foolish. If the purchaser finds, too late, that he has bought folly; let him put it in a handsome binding; for if gold and frippery will pass such qualities current when incarnated in a fop, they will perhaps do as much for them when embodied in print. At all events, the volume will fill a shelf as well as better books, and this, after a time, becomes the destiny of the best authors.

IV.

My present quarters are somewhat unusual, one need not say where, and they compel the frequent contemplation of a dilapidated chimney, especially as I lie on my bed. Before it had been knocked about, I am sure that chimney was odd looking, most certainly it is now and verging on the comical. As I lie and look at the old chimney, I feel convinced that chimneys have characters.
One recalls the many funny-looking chimneys at home and realizes that they are very like human people and credits them with minds, dispositions and temperaments. Judging by the frequent troubles they have and cause, chimneys surely have diseases and often want their doctors. Are they not affected by east and north winds just as much as any of ourselves, and have they not their own inexplicable fits of moroseness, and are they not testy when contradicted, just as ourselves? I suppose there is a faculty of smoke-doctors and doubtless learned and respectable; but whoever heard of a chimney being cured? The truth is, a chimney's disorders proceed generally from its original physical constitution, and one might just as well talk of eradicating an hereditary disease from a human being. The only remedy is to destroy the chimney altogether and make a new one.

Circumstances govern us all, and chimneys too; hence the maladies which affect chimneys proceed usually from their situation in life. A chimney of my acquaintance once proved this in a remarkable way. It was a young chimney and had a juvenile vivacity which even the east wind could not repress, but on the whole was wonderfully well-behaved. However, a day came when it developed irregularities in its conduct. Doctors were called in, who examined the patient and prescribed certain kinds of cap to be put on his head. This was done but, instead of recovering, the chimney became worse and seemed, by the increased vehemence with which it repelled the advances of the smoke, to indicate that the doctors did not understand the nature of its trouble. Alas, it was not the body but the mind of that chimney that was diseased; envy, pure envy, was the cause of all its ailments. A consultation of specialists located the cause of all its woes in the presence of a tall and threatening gable near by and whose chimneys carried their heads much higher than that of the afflicted chimney in question who, once he was allowed to carry as high a head as his neighbours, never gave any more sign of sickness. Although we can allow that chimneys may be jealous of each other's heights, and sometimes look enviously at the honour or prosperity of their neighbours, I do not think that they are in general a democratic people. Some present a curious spirit of meekness which seems to fit them best for the lower walks of life, where they are content to exercise their calling under the lordly protection of some neighbouring stack of chimneys, and without fretting about ideas of equality.

Few will dispute that chimneys are sensitive things and, perhaps, some will credit them with speech. I confess that I have
never heard them pronounce an articulate word or carry on a conversation; but, I am quite certain that they can howl. In a high wind, I have heard a chimney almost speak; in these cases, it may be that they are only expostulating or quarrelling with their enemy the wind.

Then there is the interesting topic of cleaning chimneys; they are like children and very fond of getting dirty. This suggests that noticeable set of men, called chimney sweeps. An old schoolmaster of mine used to call them the angels of darkness, in contradistinction to bakers, whom he dubbed the angels of light. If you meet either class, when dressed in your best clothes, the one is capable of being as great an annoyance as the other. An interesting point in connexion with chimney sweeps is, they see and explore a part of the world which nobody else does; especially did this feature apply to the old type of chimney sweep and climbing boy of sixty years ago. When a lad, one of my most favoured cronies was an old sweep who used to stimulate our imaginations with wonderful stories of his experiences, when cleaning and exploring the crooked and angular smoke flues of a departed type of house architecture. The remembrance of that old oddity suggests but one more instance of the severe practicality of this age, and how it has removed all romance and risk from what used to be a specialized and dangerous calling.

V.

A little while ago, I was asked to buy a fan for a lady. The commission was somewhat out of my line, but it necessitated a visit to a fashionable emporium for those articles, and suggested some reflections. The invention of the pretty bauble, known as the fan, is attributed by Madame de Genlis to a demand which arose for a foil to the excessive modesty of the ladies of the French court before the Revolution. In the time which preceded that terrible event the fan was an object of necessity to screen the blushes of the timid and bashful who used them in defence against the crude and often obscene witticisms of the court gallants. Madame de Genlis wrote "in times when ladies often blushed and desired to hide their embarrassment or timidity, they carried large fans which were at once a veil and a countenance. By agitating the fan, the female concealed herself." In these days, ladies blush but little, and may be said to be not at all timid and possessed of no desire to conceal themselves; to the modern, the fan is but an ornamental mechanism for obtaining a circulation
of air. What a falling off since the times of the Palais Royal or Cremorne, and of the little suppers at the Parc Monceaux or Vauxhall, when the King's mistresses displaced his ministers and traced out plans of campaign with their rouge, and used their patches for field marshals; when nothing was natural but the children, and nothing moral but that which was past the power of sin.

Like everything else applicable to human use, the fan had its origin in necessity. It is purely an oriental device and was invented for personal relief and convenience in hot climates. A Chinese dandy would no more be seen without his fan than a Chinese belle would; and the fan of the Nawab or Rajah serves far better purposes than concealing the blushes and embarrassments of his wives. The suspended domestic fan of our Indian bungalows helps to keep us cool and scares the mosquito. The fan even plays a part in the ritual of both the Roman and Greek churches, and is the lineal descendant or representative of primitive needs when the deacon used a fan to keep off flies from the officiating priest. In the present day; the form or symbol survives the want.

Fans came into England with other eastern objects of use, ornament or curiosity. The fan with which Queen Elizabeth is said to have graciously tapped Sir J. Perrot, an Irish Lord Lieutenant, would knock down a modern courtier. In the time of Charles II, a French fan was a fatal gift, for that which saved the modesty of Madame de Genlis' ladies purchased too often the honour of the maid of honour of the English court. It is easy to be satirical, but are our present day practices any better? Other times, other modes; the form only differs. The fan, however, was not the great rampart thrown up before the citadel of English modesty under the Stuarts. The modesty of those times had a queer habit of going to see plays so immodest that it was deemed necessary to resort to a mask for covering the face, while the fan was retained simply for the innocent purpose of "giving coolness to the matchless dame. To every other breast a flame." The tactics and manœuvres, necessary for the operating of these doible purposes, produced the well-known exercise of the fan, so delightfully detailed by the old Spectator. At last, in the decadence of manners, this elegant little implement of the coquetry of our ancestresses fell to be a mere article of utility, returning as all things must to its origin. Our ladies of the late 18th century appeared, during summer, with a good housewife-like green fan to keep off the sun, and the fan of "ma tante Aurore" was the only fan
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known to our Aunt Tabithas. The diffusion of French philosophy at length banished this instrument as an indispensable part of the British matron's toilette; the parasol was found more convenient, and the fan, employed only to cool the matchless dame, was reduced to that fairy size we know so well and to which Madame de Genlis once gave the reproachful title of \textit{eventail imperceptible}. One drops the fan and thinks truly the history of fashions is but the history of manners flavoured with vanity, and perhaps not so frivolous as some imagine.

VI.

Most of us, from time to time, must have wondered over the great problem of man's nature, his character, the conscious power to reason and even sit in judgment on our fellow men. I know that I have, and how Man is still the great enigma and an ever absorbing theme of curiosity. To solve this problem, various conjectures have been made and many pages of philosophy written. But, of all the results, since the time when Diogenes went about with a lighted candle, looking into the breasts of men for honesty, very few have given a satisfactory answer. We all are familiar with Shakespeare's lines, how "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." If so, what a strange medley must the play be wherein each one plays his own plot; some tragedy, others melodrama, a few operas, and many farces. It must puzzle strangely the audience, if there be one; but, of course the poet meant to represent the players to be only exhibiting in masquerade. Another way to regard it is to say that we are all travellers, coming we know not whence as to an inn and, having enjoyed ourselves as best we can, inquired our way and perhaps paid our reckoning, trudge on towards an undiscovered bourne. In like manner, this world can be compared to a huge mart, to which each brings his wares and means, with the hope of a profitable trade and a final rest from toil and care. But whether this world be regarded as a stage for players, a masquerade, an inn, a school or a general mart, it does not aid us much in deciding what we individually are.

One could prose indefinitely on the views of metaphysicians, and all the host of charlatans who have endeavoured to find the key to man's character or nature by such devious routes as physiognomy and phrenology, but it would be like beating a dead dog. In man, there are too many cross-breed influences and his mind too highly developed for the signs to be anything but equivocal. What can we
care for the phrenological or physical developments of Newton, or Napoleon, or the Kaiser? We judge and know them by their actions. Every falling raindrop and the planets proclaim the character and mind of the one, a history and record of reckless ambition associated with the face of Europe drenched in blood gives us an insight into the true nature and character of the other two. No, think as we can, the only true tests of character are actions. In them only can we get a clue to a man’s real nature; it is no discovery, but merely a reiteration in new guise of that old Latin tag, “Acta exteriora indicant interiora secreta.” If the least merit attach to this musing, it is solely for calling up the ghost of departed knowledge, to renew its existence.

VII.

We all have friends or relations who are very good. A recent visit to one of my relations who is acknowledged, by all that know her, to be a very estimable person prompts me to ask the question, whether it is not possible to err on the side of virtue? From our childhood up, we have been taught to be on our guard against vice and the minor immoralities such as rudeness, vanity, arrogance, pride, impoliteness, self-confidence, etc.; but, how many of us suspect danger in virtue? Odd as it may seem, I am inclined to think that we have all been so urged, threatened and coaxed into such a hatred of vice and such a partiality toward virtue, as to lose sight of some of the evil consequences of the stereotyped education. The reader may be astonished and perhaps alarmed at my position, but I flatter myself that I am taking a view of the subject as correct as it may be original. Without being an advocate for vice, is it unreasonable to think that there are people who err on the side of virtue, who carry it too far, and who think it affords them an exclusive claim for superiority? In plain language, it is possible to be too good, make virtue an unmanageable thing, and sacrifice every person’s convenience to mere goodness.

Let us look a little closely into the matter and observe the bad effects of some of the virtues. Now, what people call frankness is a virtue yet, much as one hates duplicity, it is obvious that most disagreeable effects spring from frankness. There are people who feel it a duty to say cruel things, just because they think them; they broach awkward subjects, wound generous feelings and make unnecessary disclosures about themselves and others because they are too severely honest to deceive, or suffer deceit. They
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sting you to the soul in the most affectionate way by saying, "You
must excuse me, my dear, I have no wish to hurt your feelings ";
or "You know I am your best friend, but I esteem it my duty to
be perfectly frank with you." Who has not experienced such
phrasings? Again, there is the superior person who cannot think
how anyone can wear imitation ornaments, and implies by the
remark that the wearer is guilty of a deliberate falsehood, inasmuch
as it amounts to an intention to deceive the world, and proclaim
as true what is known to be untrue. Think of the consequences
which this doubly distilled purity entails. It forbids a thousand
things, which are not only ornamental but useful and necessary.
One conjures up an endless vista of innovations upon the established
order of society. Half the lawyers would abandon their clients
without a trial; the doctors would kill their patients at once, by
telling them they would probably die in the end; the portrait
painters would have to dismiss their sitters with "Really,
Madam, you will only make yourself ridiculous by being exposed
on the canvas." Then, there is the fond mother who says, "Little
children should be seen and not heard," or "Don't ask for anything,
give half of what you have to your friends, above all things be
obedient and never quarrel." No one will deny that these are
excellent instructions, and eminently appropriate to bold, presum­
tuous, ungenerous or quarrelsome children; but too often they are
rubbed into others whose tendencies lie in a diametrically opposite
direction. These children want an infusion of less amiable quali­
ties if they are to grow up as competent men and women. The
virtues of generosity, obedience, modesty and tameness under
oppression demand to be weakened instead of strengthened in
their case.

Another thing about the ultra-good which is very irritating is
their liability to be readily shocked. One could forgive this trait
if their being shocked were simply a way of recovering their
balance of thought, but unfortunately they use it as a way of
expressing their sense of superiority. From this point of view,
the virtues should shock us no less than the vices. Thinking it
over, I am not so sure but what they do. We are taught to look
askance at the man who, having great possessions, fails to sell all
that he has and give to the poor. In real life, we should be greatly
troubled regarding one of our friends if he took such a command
seriously. Obviously then, the psychology of being shocked is not
explicable in terms of triumphant virtue. The passion for being
shocked, which some people readily display, clearly needs directing
into proper channels; this means a need to be shocked by the conventions themselves rather than by breaches of the conventions. The natural corollary to this is, that society progresses only in so far as it learns to be shocked not by other people, but by itself. If this were to come about, it is probable that Heaven would shock people far more than earth has succeeded in doing; therein lies at once our condemnation and our comedy. Meanwhile, we are likely to go on preaching against our neighbour's sins, and sinning against our preaching, till the end of time. That merely proves the completeness of our humanity; certainly it makes for balance which is a conclusion that ought to satisfy most people, even though it does not quite prove that there is a danger in being too good.